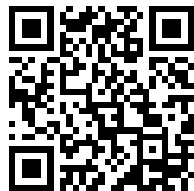


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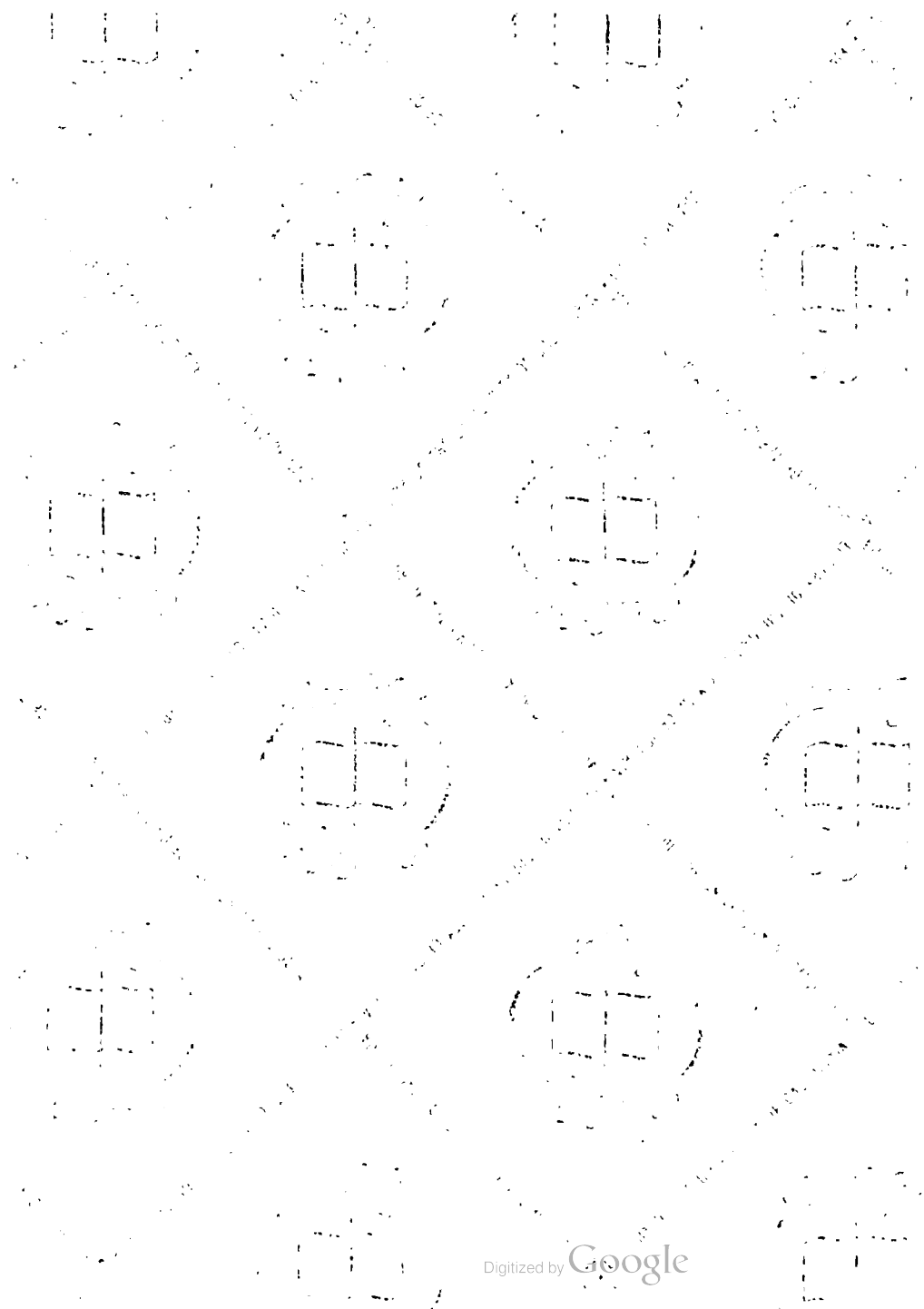
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*SELAM    SKETCHES*  
*AND TALES OF BOSNIAN LIFE*





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# SELAM SKETCHES

AND TALES OF BOSNIAN LIFE

*TRANSLATED BY  
MRS. WAUGH*

BY  
MILENA MRAZOVIC

SANS PEUR ET  
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## P R E F A C E.

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WHAT is the prevalent opinion of the thinking world nowadays concerning the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina? On the principle that to remain unknown is better than to be known incorrectly, I would reply—*Under the most favourable circumstances, none at all*—more often, a hazy or false one.

Thus, although in these days of rapid communication, the above-named provinces lie at a scarcely appreciable distance from the great centres of intellectual thought, nay, almost within touch of the circle of European culture, they remain practically unknown to Europe; and this whilst the remotest regions of the earth are being explored, and expeditions in all directions, even to the North Pole, are being undertaken.

For centuries the people of the Balkans have stood upon the threshold unnoticed; simply forgotten. If at any time a sound from them has forced its way across the Save, it has been but a cry of agony, to which Europe, for a moment, has turned an unwilling ear. "Barbarians," has then been the comment. And the word "barbarian" still hovers on people's lips, although some fifteen years have passed since Austro-Hungary has pityingly taken the distressed countries under its protectorate; and despite the fact that within this

period the press, by dint of numberless publications, has striven to bring about a more practical knowledge of both land and people.

Notwithstanding all this, the noble sensitive sons of golden Bosnia, and of brave Herzegovina are still classed, together with the negroes of the Congo, simply, as 'barbarians.'

My attachment to those provinces, my love for the people from whom I, moreover, claim descent, has suggested these slight sketches to my pen. They are an attempt to afford an insight into the soul of an unknown and, therefore, despised race.

In dread lest I may not have succeeded in my aim, I venture to offer this little volume—the first of its kind—to the reading public.

It is no artistic "Selam," bound together by the master spirits of Eastern poetry, but a bunch of modest field flowers culled in far-off valleys and on lonely heights—a greeting—a "Selam" from Bosnia.

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## EMIN'S LUCK



# SELAM.

## EMIN'S LUCK.

To have seen the Charshija (market quarter) of one little Bosnian town, is to have seen them all. In each are to be found the same narrow lanes of booths piled high with rich and costly wares; in each the same heavily-laden beasts of burden toiling along under the lash of their scolding drivers; here and there, probably, a running spring always surrounded by youths and maidens; the whole, veiled in summer in clouds of dust, ever surmounted by the slender minaret of a neighbouring mosque.

It was in just such a Charshija that a young man might have been seen sauntering about since early morning. He wore a fez, was clad in Frankish dress, and his appearance was dusty and travel-stained, as though he had just come off a long journey. Apparently some six-and-twenty years of age, he had a good-looking,

sun-burnt countenance, dark melancholy eyes, while his movements displayed all the gravity of an Oriental.

Hadji Salih the slipper maker, Selman Aga the silk merchant, and many another, shook their heads as they wondered who this stranger in Frankish dress could be, comporting himself thus oddly. When not pacing the length of the Market street, with eyes fixed on the ground, and often roughly thrust aside by mule drivers, he would suddenly stop in the middle of the road, as if rooted to the spot, and stare up immovably at the large handsome house, which, facing a side street that ran through the centre of the market, formed one corner of the Charshija.

Whenever had a stranger been seen to stare so boldly up at the windows of another man's house? The youth could be but little acquainted with good manners—besides, what was there in the building to attract him? Plain of structure and unpretending, its unlatticed windows clearly showed that they did not belong to the women's quarters. And yet it was those very windows which appeared to rivet the young man's attention, as with every swaying motion of the hanging curtains within, he seemed to catch a glimpse of a little pert nose, and the flash of a pair of brilliant dark eyes gleaming through

their folds, and a rush of emotion would pass over his face.

Hadji Meho, an old Bosnian majstor (guild master), and like all his fellows, an adept at every kind of handicraft, was squatting in the centre of his shop surrounded by a varied collection of wares. Growing weary of the young stranger's eccentric conduct, Hadji Meho, perhaps because he could perceive nothing thus to attract the youth's gaze, perhaps because the said youth had planted himself so immediately in front of the old man's shop that customers could not even get a sight of him, Hadji Meho resolved to accost the mysterious stranger with the intention of administering a slight reproof, and was pondering the manner of that reproof, when, abruptly turning round the stranger accosted him.

"Can you tell me who is the owner of the house over there?" he asked in purest Bosnian.

The old man stared at him awhile, puffed out a tremendous cloud of smoke, stroked his grey beard, and then said deliberately:

"The house over there? The owner?"

"Right," returned the stranger, thoughtfully nodding his head, as though fully satisfied; nor could he have expected to receive any other

answer. "And can you not further inform me as to the name of the owner?" he resumed.

Hadji Meho, slyly blinking his little eyes at this question, slid across the floor to his vice, steadied it between his knees, and began filing away with a will.

"Now do you know, I know nothing," he answered at length. "I do not trouble myself about other people's houses; nor am I the mukhtar (chief magistrate). If you do not know to whom the house belongs, why do you stand staring at it as if you wanted to charm away all the rats in it?— Well, and what do you want, Mustapha," turning to a small boy, "your mother's spectacles not right yet, eh? Too small, and so she cannot manage to see through them? Well, tell her not to wear them so low on her nose, and then she won't look over them. And you, Yussuf? Your umbrella broken again? Have I not told you before that the way to open it is not to drag at one of the wires until it snaps, but so——"

Puff! The umbrella flew open right in the stranger's face, sending his cigarette flying, to the delight of several street urchins, who at once began to scramble for it. With much deliberation the stranger, drawing his tobacco pouch from his pocket, now sat down beside

Hadji Meho, his long legs stretching out across the pavement, and began composedly to roll a fresh cigarette.

"What do you smoke, majstor?" he asked carelessly. "Your own growing? Humph! Must have been a bad year—smells like cabbage leaves. Try my tobacco—true Arabian—brought it back with me."

Scornfully the old majstor eyed the youth and his proffered tobacco.

"True Arabian! Do you suppose I have never seen any, that I should take this dried stinging nettle for the real thing? It happens that a nephew of mine sent me some three years ago from Mecca, its aroma is fragrant as that of oil of cloves."

With a start, the young man looked full in the face of the speaker, then, leaning back against a heap of coal, exclaimed in tones of the greatest astonishment:

"Then you must be my uncle, Hadji Meho?"

At these words, the majstor, giving a nervous start, silently darted a look at the young man, grasped at his turban with trembling hands, pressed it down more firmly over his forehead, then, as if in dire perplexity, began feeling about among his tools.

The stranger seized him by the arm.



"Tell me, uncle, how come you to be in this town? Is my sister here, too?"

The loquacious old man seemed suddenly to have lost all power of speech.

"Your sister?" he stammered. "Well, you see, Emin, we wrote you a long letter to Mecca—telling you everything." He wiped the drops of perspiration from his brow, as he saw Emin's look of surprise. "You know," he resumed in confusion, "when all those years ago you went out into the wide world to seek your luck, because we were so poor, it is true we promised you never to leave your sister whom you had married so well to the rich Yuzbashi. But we grew old, your aunt and I, and, as you know is the case in the army, the Yuzbashi had to change quarters, and was suddenly ordered here with his men, and we came with him. After a time we should have had to move on again, and as—as we had grown old, your aunt and I, we—just stayed where we were."

Hadji Meho, who had grown red as fire during this speech, now began mopping his face with a handkerchief the size of a towel.

Emin, in his agitation, was twisting a piece of metal in his slender fingers as though it were pasteboard.

"How long is it since my sister and her husband left this place?"

Here the old man was seized with a violent paroxysm of coughing.

"About a year," he coughed out.

"And where did they go?"

"To——" here the paroxysm became so severe that the name of the place was inaudible. "Your aunt will give you all particulars. She is over there," and he pointed towards the house that Emin had been watching so intently.

"What—in that house? Are you living there, then?"

"No. Humph! A Bimbashi lives there. Your sister, too, did live there at one time——" he broke off, and looked away. "Your aunt is only there in service now. You know we are very poor—it is only of an evening, when there is no moon, that she comes home!"

"When there is no moon?"

Emin looked about as though to assure himself that he was not mad. Then he began to ponder. Perhaps his sister had not got on well of late with her aunt, and so they had parted; and that was why his uncle was so disconcerted at his sudden re-appearance. Buried in thought he began pressing the sheet of tin he held in his hand into the mouth of an old coffee mill, and was proceeding to turn the handle, when the old man, snatching it out of his hand, exclaimed:

B

"Selman Ageniza's coffee mill! What are you about, Emin? You will destroy it!"

"But she is well—my sister?" asked Emin thoughtfully.

"Should I be sitting here, were she not, boy? Just you go across—go to your aunt. Women can explain things so much better than men. She will be alone now; the others are all out. Go through the first courtyard, then knock three times at the door of the inner one; my wife will think it is I who knock—then tell me how she is looking——"

Again Emin stared at him in amazement. The old man nodded his head mournfully.

"It seems to me that you are not particularly glad to see me again?" exclaimed the young man, as he slowly rose.

For all answer the old majstor took off his turban, and drew out from the hollow a little fragrant packet.

"For three whole years I have carried this about with me; it is a capital remedy for headache I find too. Only on Fridays have I allowed myself a cigarette of this choice tobacco, and then, as at all other times, I have invoked the blessing of Allah upon the sender of it."

Acknowledging these words with truly regal gesture, Emin bent his head so low that the

tassel of his fez fell over his classic nose, then, without again looking up, strode obliquely across the road towards the house at the corner; while the old majstor, his eyes bedimmed with tears, with much care wrapped up a rusty old horse-shoe in silver paper, then threw the slender Habiba's gold girdle-clasp on to the heap of old iron.

"Silence gives no one a headache—my old woman will tell him all," he thought. "Poor fellow! What can have brought him here of all places? I am only thankful to have got rid of him and his awkward questions."

Arrived at the gateway of the house, the young man glanced up at the window, and a flash of joy irradiated his gloomy countenance.

"Raifa," he whispered tenderly. "Little golden rose! How true is it that 'Bagdad is no distance to a lover.' I have followed you to the other end of the earth, and now——" he convulsively seized the latch. "Ah well!" he continued to himself, "better lose everything than sacrifice one's luck; that's a thing a man must seize with both hands! And all seems turning out so well. My aunt in this very house! But my sister?" And again an indefinable sense of oppression came over him, he knew not why.

At length, pushing open the gate, he entered the first little courtyard. Not a soul was to be seen; upon the lowest step of the winding wooden staircase, leading to the men's side of the house, lay a cat asleep. Casting cautious glances around him, he slowly crossed the well-scoured paving-stones to the inner door, within which was the women's quarter, and, with a beating heart, shyly knocked.

"Come along, sonny," cried a well-known, somewhat rasping woman's voice, "I heard you coming. Take care! I am standing by the fountain with my back towards you."

Emin now entered, and, in truth, saw a tall, angular female figure, with large-flowered nether garments drawn up high, and feet thrust into a pair of clumsy *nalyn* (wooden shoes) standing by the fountain in a little pool of water, in which a party of young ducklings were merrily splashing.

"Heaven's blessing be on you, Aunt Umihana!"

At the sound of a strange man's voice, the woman, giving a terrified start, remained for a few minutes motionless in her stooping attitude; then cautiously folding her hands before her that the stranger might not see them, glanced furtively over her shoulder, unable longer to repress her curiosity; while the young man, at

the sight of the droll apparition, broke into a peal of loud laughter.

"Emin!" she cried, and sprang towards him.

As she moved the water splashed; the ducklings quacked; and the long plait of hair (dyed black, according to Turkish custom) hanging down under her kerchief like a huge rat's tail, swung round in wide gyrations.

"Oh, sonny. Has the lightning brought you? Whence come you?"

"From Mecca."

"Better had you turned back the way you came, than to have come hither."

"Both you and Hadji Meho are giving me a pretty welcome!" exclaimed the young man bitterly.

"Ah, why have you come at a time when Providence has caused the voice of singing to cease with us, but not that of weeping. Tell me, what has Hadji Meho said to you?" And her clear eyes gazed searchingly at him, while her furrowed mouth twitched as though with repressed sobs.

"Nothing, unless I have clean forgotten my mother tongue; he said that if I came across now you would have time to tell me."

"Inshallah, what sense can woman's wit pour

into your ears? But, tell me, is Hadji Meho looking well?"

"Why ask me such a question?"

"Clever is Hadji Meho, who can be both wise and stupid at one and the same time! So he told you nothing?"

"Nothing."

Aunt Umihana, now drying her eyes with a corner of her kerchief, made her way with comically long strides to the half-open house door, and crouched down behind it on the stones of the cool corridor, Emin mechanically taking up his position outside the threshold under the burning rays of the sun; thus according to Oriental custom neither could see the other, though they could converse together.

And now a long significant pause ensued, during which Aunt Umihana pushed a bowl, filled with plums and water towards the doorway.

"Eat, sonny. You must be hungry after the long journey. And what is the special reason of your coming hither?"

"To seek my luck."

"So you said ten years ago, when you went to Mecca. Do you expect to catch your luck as I do my hens?"

"With the difference that a man's luck is not

to be caught by the tail as you do your hens. I must make a note of that."

The old woman behind the door shook her head mournfully. Emin could only see the red-dyed finger tips fishing for plums.

"Now, listen to a tale of ill-luck, sonny. Hearken, it is close upon ten years since Hadji Meho and I have seen each other."

Emin stared in amazement, but said nothing.

"Ah, men have heavier burdens to bear than have iron bridges. Listen— Shortly after your sister was married, and you had started for Mecca, Hadji Meho, the Wise, took it into his head to grow jealous."

Emin's dark eyes assumed a laughing expression.

"Oh, honey-sweet Emin, had you but seen him! Jealousy became Meho as well as a golden saddle becomes an ass. Wise as he is, there is a tile loose in his top-story. It was rumoured in the Charshija that certain married women were being visited by females wearing moustachios under their yashmaks (the veil that covers the face), and it struck him that a big female came very often to visit me, whereupon he began to entertain hideous suspicions. How often have I seen him standing at our door, eyeing my guest's big slippers. At length he flatly refused



to make coffee for her any more ; and it was not long before we began to fall out with each other daily. And once, when Allah's wrath was poured out upon us, the devil caused him to utter the words:—"Three times shall you be cast off, if ever our eyes meet each other's again."\*

"Oh, sonny," sobbed Aunt Umihana in her corner, "hardly had the evil words been spoken, before the tall woman came into our courtyard with veil thrown back, so that even my husband could see her face. I heard him break out into penitent sobbing, and straightway threw myself on my face so as not to meet his eyes. But of what avail was that? I came over to your sister, our Hatidja, and only on dark nights do I go back to our own home to bewail with him our mutual sorrow."

There was a strange silence in the sun-bathed courtyard when Aunt Umihana's rasping voice

\* According to Hanefitic law, a Mohammedan husband has the right to annul his legal marriage by the act of "casting off." This "casting off" can be either "ridschii" revocable, or "bain" irrevocable. In the latter case the word must be uttered three times, or the number "three" be named. Every act of "Casting off" may also be associated with the naming of a condition, or future period of time ; in which case the marriage remains valid until that condition or period of time be reached. Should the husband desire to take back his "bain" cast off wife, this can only be accomplished by her marrying some other man and being "bain" cast off by him.

had ceased. The ducks were drying themselves upon a plot of grass in a corner, ever and anon gazing out of their sleepy eyes at the buzzing gnats. Emin was leaning his head against the door post, listening abstractedly, puffing out the smoke of his cigarette in sharp whiffs, his eyes the while uninterruptedly directed towards a side window above, through the projecting lattice work of which gleamed a white silken sleeve.

"And what about my sister, where is she?" now asked the young man.

At the same moment, there was a sharp tapping on the window lattice.

"Aha!" said Umihana, with scornful laugh, as she thrust out her nose from behind the door. "Do you hear her, sonny? Give me her luck, I would throw you in her brains for nothing."

Emin had grown crimson.

"Who is that?" he asked with unsteady voice. Aunt Umihana made a contemptuous gesture.

"Do not trouble your head about her. She is the mistress here—wife of the Bimbashi—an unfledged young thing. My mistress! Heaven help me! It's better to eat one's own oats, than strange folks' rice!"

"Who obliged you to do it, aunt?"

"Humph! How could we help it? We had been a burden on your sister long enough."

"Did she let you feel it?"

"Heaven forbid! We lived together as sisters; all the same our purses were not brothers. We came to this town with Hatidja, and as Hadji Meho can do well here as majstor, and we had not courage in our misfortune to face a fresh change, I stayed on in this house, and Hadji Meho in his shop. Here, at least, we can talk without seeing each other."

"And my sister?" Emin now asked impatiently.

"She has gone a long way off," blurted out Aunt Umihana hurriedly. "I think to Konjiza, or Vlaseniza, somewhere about there—I have forgotten the name—just like a woman's memory!—But Hadji Meho has it written down upon a sheet of paper at home."

Emin glared suspiciously at the door behind which the speaker was hidden.

"Do you know, Aunt Umihana," he said, "it is easier to speak a lie than to believe it?"

"Merciful powers! who tells you that I am lying?" moaned the old woman. "Hatidja is in the best of health, and only went away from here a few months ago. Heaven only knows, I was sad enough to part from her—but our mis-

fortune—whether one casts a stone at the pot, or the pot at a stone it comes to the same thing in the end.”

“I feel as if I were next door to a fool,” cried Emin wrathfully.

“Now, sonny, be calm,” said Aunt Umihana thrusting out her head again. “You tell Hadji Meho as soon as it is dark, to send neighbour Yusso across to fetch me home, and then we three will talk things over together.”

“Talk things over together? What things?” Now a sound of hand-clapping from the window above was heard.

“Ah well, she can wait,” grumbled Umihana Khanum, glancing up to the window.

“Hearken, sonny,” she said coaxingly, “tell no one who you are, nor what has brought you here, until we have consulted together. As for what brings you here, I don’t know myself.”

Here Emin, bending down to Aunt Umihana’s ear, whispered low, with eyes aflame:

“What brings me here? To seek my luck—I told you before—and I shall find it in your mistress’—in Raifa’s arms!”

Horried, Aunt Umihana sprang up.

“Mashallah! The sun has turned his brain!” she exclaimed, and pushed him from the threshold, and out of the courtyard as though fearing

he might force his way into the house. "Hadji Meho will tell him everything; I cannot," she thought. "Poor boy; so fond as he is of his sister! Already he is half-crazed, and does not know why," and nearer and nearer she thrust him towards the outer gate. "Now, go away, sonny! To-night we will tell each other everything.—Women might be coming in, and were they to find you here! Uff! But, mind, tell no one who you are."

The young man looked her straight in the face; his eyes flashed.

"Have no fear, aunt. Nothing is to be gained here by force, of that I am well aware. But I mean to win my luck, even if——"

"Yes, yes—if! If the gipsy had as much flour as he lacks of butter, he too would make himself a pitta," (pancake) said his aunt with good-natured derision.

"Umihana!" angrily cried a clear girlish voice, and the sound of a foot stamping on the wooden floor, was distinctly audible.

As if transfigured, Emin looked up.

"Go now, my son, go," said his aunt, thrusting him out at the gate. "And," she added with a sly look up at the windows, "beware of narrow streets and crazy house owners!"

Ere he knew how it had happened, the youth

found himself again in the street. Something like a feeling of giddiness came over him—was it the journey . . . fatigue . . . or what he had just heard. . . ? Emin pressed his hand to his burning forehead. What had he heard? Something there was that they were withholding from him. What was that something?

Once more he crossed the street to Hadji Meho's shop. Going close up to it he perceived that it was shut. Had his uncle gone off in order to avoid him? It almost seemed so; but where then to find him? He was about to return to Aunt Umihana, to ask her where his uncle lived, when at that very instant, he saw women's veiled figures disappearing within the gate of the house opposite.

Patiently he sat down on a stone before his uncle's shop, and waited. Why had he suddenly grown so uneasy? With the tenacity of a hound on the scent he had sought Raifa and found her. What was to follow must now be thought out. Nor had he had any thought of finding his sister in this town; only this unexpected meeting with his relations had given him cause for anxiety. Why, he could not explain to himself. Unweariedly he gazed up at the window of the opposite house, behind the curtains of which he seemed to see a pale face gleaming.

His thoughts roamed away to the far-off south—in imagination he saw the slender graceful form of a maiden clad in gown of white silk, with long flowing sleeves, strings of ducats and pearls braided in her dark hair, as she wandered among the tropical flowers of an Arabian garden, and feathery palms waved their greetings to her in the evening breeze.

\* \* \* \* \*

Emin's head sank lower and lower upon his breast, and as the moon rose in the sky, the night watchman with a rough shake roused him from his slumbers and conducted him to his inn.

The morning sun found him again before Hadji Meho's shop, but in vain did Emin wait to see it opened. As was to be expected, his questions of the neighbours anent Hadji Meho's non-appearance, obtained no answers; the stranger was looked upon with suspicion. A further attempt to see Umihana also proved a failure, the surly attendants at the outer gate bidding him go about his business.

What should he do? Of whom take counsel? His brain seemed on fire with the fever of his thoughts; could he but find his sister, did he only know where to seek her, all would be well.

He felt as if he must roam the country round in search of her ; yet that window chained him to the spot. Ever again and again his eyes were riveted upon it

"To-morrow," thought he, "to-morrow I will be up and doing."

And as night came on, the watchman again led him home.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Umihana ! Umihana !"

The cry grew more and more impatient ; while the old woman, still lost in thought, stood gazing fixedly at the door, through which her nephew had but now disappeared. With a heavy sigh, turning away at last, she slowly ascended the well-scoured wooden stairs.

In the centre of a spacious ante-room, upon a Persian carpet, stood a dainty little figure, clad in flame-coloured silken *dimlija* (trousers) and gold-embroidered jacket with flowing white sleeves, a little fez adorned with a bunch of roses pressed low upon her forehead, her long plaits of hair reaching nearly to her feet. So she stood with tiny fists clenched, eyes flashing, white teeth angrily gleaming, as Umihana appeared.

"To those whom Allah designs to punish



are servants given!" she cried. "How dared you admit that strange man into my courtyard and sit down to talk with him?"

"I thought you were still engaged in looking out on to the street, Raifa Khanum, and would not notice it," returned Umihana derisively to her young mistress.

Raifa grew crimson.

"Answer my question."

"Well, Emin has every right to enter this house; he is my nephew, and——" here Umihana, stepping close up to her mistress, bent down to her, "and Hatidja's brother!"

Once more Raifa changed colour, then, shrugging her shoulders, left Umihana standing where she was, and crossed the connecting corridor to her husband's apartments, where, squatting upon the divan that ran round the wall of the room, she looked through an opening of the curtains into the street below.

Yes, there again she saw that hateful face with its intolerably melancholy eyes. For a whole year she had vainly striven to free herself from the recollection of it; waking or sleeping it had been before her; and now, suddenly, it had appeared in living form.

Rapidly crossing to a window overlooking the courtyard, she called up a small boy.

"Do you see the man over there, Suljo?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then go and tell the men-servants, Bairo, Mujo, and the rest to see to it that that man does not come into our courtyard again, or——," and a by no means gentle box on the ear despatched the lad at the top of his speed to carry out his mistress's instructions, while Raifa, crouching again like a kitten on the divan, continued gazing fixedly at the pale young man, who, weary to death, sat upon a stone before Hadji Meho's shop.

"Raifa Khanum," said Aunt Umihana, coming into the room, "visitors are here. Little Tifia and her mother-in-law. Tifia is wearing her lovely fez with the many ducats and *agraffe* of brilliants. Come along!"

"I will not!" shrieked Raifa, striking about her like a naughty child. "Let them sit and drown themselves in coffee, I will not go to them, I don't want to!" and again she remained alone.

It grew darker and darker in the room; night set in. The muezzin called the first hour of prayer from the adjacent minaret, and still the young wife sat on gazing at Emin, whose eyes had long before closed in sleep. With loud,

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angry sobs, she threw herself back upon the divan, beating the soft cushions with her clenched fists.

"Why will he not leave me in peace? Why has he followed me here?" she cried. "I could kill him with rage—with hate!"

"The master has just returned from Talym" (manœuvres), said Umihana, noiselessly entering. "He has brought gentlemen home with him; you cannot stay here any longer, Raifa Khanum."

Trembling with excitement, the little so-desperately-hating Khanum suffered herself to be led back to the haremlik, where, crouching down in a little room, she began to weep afresh.

"If the Bimbashi asks for me," she sobbed out, "say I do not want to see him—I am ill, dangerously ill. Uff!" and she cried and cried, until she cried herself to sleep.

"Fate can decree no greater punishment to a man than to give him an 'only daughter' to wife as is Raifa," grunted Umihana.

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The next morning Raifa was sitting in her room half-buried in cushions, her head bound round with a towel. On the rug beside her

squatted the Bimbashi, a dignified-looking man, in the becoming uniform of a Turkish officer, with coal-black moustache, eyes of the same hue, and dazzlingly-white teeth, who, drinking his morning coffee, puffed the while at a long student's pipe, given him in Constantinople by a German naval officer.

"What is the matter with you, little one?" he asked good humouredly. "Headache? So you have a head then? Dear! dear! Shall I ask the hekym (doctor)? No? What has made you ill?"

"Ask Umihana," said the Khanum feebly, the corners of her mouth quivering tearfully. "That woman will worry me to death. But, of course, I dare not say a word; she is mistress here."

The Bimbashi was silent. His silence exasperated his young wife.

"She told me yesterday that I was always looking out of the window," said she querulously. "As if I let people see my face!"

"Humph!" observed the Bimbashi. "You do look out of window, you know, and out of my unlatticed ones too."

"And is there any harm in that?"

"No; humph! but ladies do not do such things, and custom and law are pretty nearly akin."

Now she burst into such a paroxysm of tears, that he started up in alarm.

"So I am no well-bred Turkish woman, because now and then I steal a peep into the street. I am to stay for ever sitting on the floor of this room, with only toothless Umihana to look at? Oh, you torment me to death, you and Umihana. You are only waiting for me to die that Hatidja may come back."

"Uff," moaned the Bimbashi. "What on earth am I to do with this crazy piece of womankind! Raifa! Silly child, listen to me."

She had meanwhile buried herself in the cushions; so passing his arm under them, he shook them vigorously.

"For all I care you may look out into the street as much as you like. Umihana is to say nothing to you about it. Do you hear?"

"I can't!" groaned Raifa.

"What can't you?"

"Look out into the street."

"No? And why not?"

Sitting bolt upright, Raifa wiped away her tears, and said gravely,

"There's a man now who is always standing below."

"That I cannot forbid."

"But he is looking up to see me, Sabit Bey."

The Bimbashi's comment was inaudible.

"That should make you more careful," he observed at length.

"But I will not have him look up," she began anew in high falsetto. "I will not see him; I don't want to."

"But I cannot send him to *hups* (prison) for that!" and the Bimbashi looked down disconsolately at his pipe that had gone out.

Raifa, leaning forward, gazed at him with such an expression of terrible earnestness, that he had to bite his lips to keep back his laughter.

"Do you know who the man is?"

"*Yok* (no), my dove."

"He is that make-believe husband from Mecca—that scoundrel who will not give me up. And who knows what he wants now!"

Here the Bimbashi burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"Why, Raifa child, it's money for a drink he wants from you. He is a Bosnian on the way home. What else should he want?"

"One may beckon to a blind cat for ever and a day!" exclaimed the Khanum wrathfully, and hid herself once more among her cushions.

The Bimbashi, shaking his head, left the room. Outside stood Umihana.

"Do not be angry, master," said she humbly, "but she really is too fond of looking out of window; and then her eyes sparkle like brilliants."

"Let her be," he answered, warding her off.

"No, master; as one makes the batter, so will the pitta be."

"She will have grown reasonable by the time I come back to-night."

"You think so, master? Well, she is but a child, and so I must even put up with her; but our Hatidja——"

"Kismet!" he muttered, and went hurriedly away.

A little later Raifa was sitting again on the divan by the window looking on to the street, staring into Emin's hollow eyes, as he took up his position once more before his uncle's shop.

"We are deadly enemies," thought she, with a shudder.

She gazed down the street at the heavily-laden beasts of burden, at the shops filled with their costly wares. She wanted to turn her thoughts to other things, yet found her eyes and thoughts ever with Emin.

"If only I might never see him any more; if

only Sabit Bey would free me from the horrid man!" she groaned.

Neither meat nor drink would she touch, and as the shades of evening fell, Umihana found her in hysterics.

That evening, on his return to the house, the Bimbashi enquired after Raifa Khanum.

"She is still crying," said Umihana. "When a woman weeps, ask her what she wants."

"You are right," returned Sabit Bey. "Tell Raifa that to-morrow morning she need weep no more."

The Bimbashi kept his word. By the time the sun rose again in the heavens Raifa wept no more. The stone before Hadji Meho's shop was untenanted. Emin had disappeared.

But with the victory won over Raifa Khanum's tears, Aunt Umihana's began to flow.

"What can have happened to my sonny and to Hadji Meho? There's not a soul to care for old Umihana. If only I might look across at the shop! But I fear, by so doing, I might see Hadji Meho. I cannot say a word to these people, they would only laugh at me. Mashallah! I have no luck! If a golden ox were to fall down from the sky it would be sure to crush in my roof!"

Several days passed without any change.



Raifa's quick-silver merriment had vanished ; her sparkling eyes grown dim. White and silent she sat all day at the window looking on to the street, until evening brought the Bimbashi home.

He, poor man, could in no wise account for his wife's changed mood. Something, moreover, appeared to be weighing on his spirits, and the line between his eyebrows deepened daily.

Hadji Meho's shop had re-opened ; the old majstor was more silent and surly than ever. Did anyone approach him, he would look up with startled enquiring air.

Raifa gazed and gazed across at that shop, and sometimes there would rise up before her the vision of a pale face, with eyes weary unto death.

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Suddenly she uttered a piercing shriek, while her hands convulsively clutched the curtains. With horror-stricken eyes she stared at a troop of soldiers marching past the house, one of whom was a tall young man, with head down-cast. In that soldier she had recognized Emin.

"What has Sabit done? What have I done?" she groaned. "Sister and brother both made unhappy by me."

Her cry had brought Umihana to the room,

With rapid movement, tearing aside the curtains, Raifa pointed with trembling hand to Emin.

Umihana bent hurriedly forward, and, as if struck by lightning, started as hurriedly back.

Her eyes and those of Hadji Meho, who chanced to be looking up at the window, had met. Aunt Umihana was irrevocably "cast off."

"So Raifa has gone?"

Bimbashi Sabit Bey sat on the square of carpet in the middle of his ante-room, and, in unsteady voice, which he in vain endeavoured to control, addressed this question to Umihana, who, her back turned to him, was crouching on the top step of the staircase.

"Ah, master, when winter once breaks over the land, bright as the sun may shine, it cannot ward it off. For days past Raifa has been as if a Jinn (evil spirit) had changed her. Only last night, between tears and laughter, she told me how her father, the rich Mohammed Bey, had sworn to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but, death overtaking him, he had extorted from her a promise to visit the holy Caaba in his stead. Arrived at Mecca, she had found herself compelled to go through the form of marriage with an unknown man; for an unmarried woman may not look upon the holy Caaba. For baksheesh,

there are any number of such make-believe husbands to be found in Mecca, who release the girls from their vows after they have visited the holy shrine. Young men out there make a living by it, as with us papooshijas live by making slippers. So Raifa took one of these ready-made husbands, whom she had never seen before, and who ought never to have seen her; but he refused to speak the words that would have given her her freedom. This is what Raifa told me yesterday."

"I know all that," growled the Bimbashi.

"Then she went on to tell how, on board the ship that brought her hither from Stamboul, she saw you, oh master, and how she fell in love with you—"

The Bimbashi here coughed loudly.

"Let be, Umihana, there is no altering things now. Where can she have gone without telling me?"

"Had you but kept a tighter hand over her when you took her to wife, master!"

"A good horse needs no bridle."

Umihana wept silently.

"Let me, too, away from this house. I want to go to Hatidja."

The Bimbashi puffed out a mighty cloud of smoke.

"If she allow it! It was Hatidja's wish that you should stay here—to remind me of her."

"Oh, master, but I cannot stay. Hadji Meho! Do not try to comfort me," she sobbed. "In summer it is easy to feed sparrows. You have two wives, and I have not one husband."

"Merciful heavens! My two wives have left me but a two-fold sorrow. Still while there are heads, there will be fezes to fit them. You have only to marry again, and—"

Umihana struck her hands together over her head, while a bright flush suffused her wrinkled face.

"Mashallah, master. What are you saying? Are we then among those godless Persians, who marry only to be divorced again? Besides, think you that old Umihana is likely to find another husband so easily? Ah, master, I know I shall never hear my Meho's voice again; he is a stranger to me now, one, who, in honour, dare not speak to me; and the shame and disgrace I am powerless to remove."

"Stuff and nonsense," growled the Bimbashi.

"However, talk as we may, we shall get no further. If only I knew what had become of that silly child, Raifa?"

"And do you not know yet? Oh, master, it's

as clear as the nose before your face. I would not say anything before this, because, of course, I am the stupidest person in the house ; and because, I thought to myself when one is among blind folk it is best to shut one eye."

Sabit Bey had laid aside his pipe, and was looking expectantly at her.

"What was it you would not say?"

"What! Oh, my lamb, my handsome Bimbashi! Perhaps I ought to have told you, but Allah would not let me. It was as if my lips had been sealed. Hadji Meho, too, hid himself when the time came to speak ; in fact, we dreaded that trouble would come of it. But now the key may follow the casket. Did you not see the young man for sake of whom Raifa's tears were so freely flowing, and whom you forced to become a soldier? Well, it is on his account that Raifa has run away. Yes, my Bimbashi, Providence does not deal out happiness as a cook does his soup."

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The servants knew not what to make of recent events. The Bimbashi's house had become so strangely silent ; everything connected with it so mysterious. The mistress who used to be for ever drumming on the window panes

had suddenly vanished ; Umihana had gone, as she said, for ever ; even Hadji Meho's shop opposite was again closed ; and the Bimbashi himself had remained shut up in his room since early morning, eating nothing, saying nothing, only incessantly smoking his long pipe.

The Bimbashi really did act very strangely. At first, he sat with frowning brow, pondering his situation as a deserted husband ; then continued to sit on, waiting for some happy inspiration to help him out of it. So he remained puffing out huge volumes of smoke, until the room was thick with it, and the smoker lost in dreamy thought.

What a pretty little house it was, that one outside the town encircled by high walls, and standing on the well-wooded slope of a hill. In the roseate shadows of evening stands a tall, slender woman with sad face, her head veiled as is customary to widows, the woman he had struck to the heart, when he had brought home from his travels the laughing Raifa as his second wife. She, the haughty Hatidja, had declared that in that house, among the trees, she would live a solitary life of prayer and fasting, until it pleased heaven to bring her husband back to her.

What happy days were those when he had

married Hatidja, and Emin, then quite a lad, had helped him to run away with her. And now the door opening, Emin walks in.

"Can fancy play the magician?" thought the Bimbashi. "Is it really Emin, or is it a delusion of my brain? How tall and majestic he has grown, how grave his bearing, how well the uniform and red sash become him. Is it his ghost that has come to take me to his sister? I will try—will speak to him."

"Welcome, beloved brother! Hast thou fallen from the clouds? Ha! Bairo, Mujo, lazy hounds, bring coffee for brother Emin; and lead out two of my fleetest steeds from the stable, one for me, the best for Emin. Speak not, if thou hast nought of kindness to say, for I mean to be a happy man once more to-day, and once more it shall be thou who dost help me to my happiness! Why glare at me as a butcher at the sheep he is about to slay?"

The young man standing before him was looking furiously at him.

"Here is my sword! I am unarmed. Strike me dead, murderer of my peace! From your soldiers I must needs learn that you are the former Yuzbashi, my sister's husband, and that you are keeping her in confinement outside the town. They dared to jeer at me."

"At whom? At me? Well might they do so!"

"Ah, scoff as you will, monster. You have reeked your worst on me, but death heals all wounds. My wife, too, you have stolen from me," he thundered.

The Bimbashi struck his head with his clenched hand.

"To think that that should never have occurred to me. So you are that make-believe husband of Raifa's from Mecca, who refused to give up his wife, and whom I forcibly enrolled into my regiment. How was I to imagine such a thing? Come, young man, if you do not wish to rouse my ire, make a clean breast of it. Tell me, how came you to commit such a piece of folly?"

Emin suddenly looked remarkably sheepish.

"Without wings the eagle cannot fly," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I happened to be without money, and wanted to make some. I had seen her once walking under the palm trees in a garden. Ah! she was lovely, lovely as a poem of Hafiz! The next day I was chosen to marry her. It was but natural that I should desire to make a valid marriage out of the fictitious one; but natural that I should refuse to give her back her freedom."



The young man, sinking down upon the divan, here covered his face with his hands, while tears slowly trickled through his slender fingers.

"Had you but gone through what I did, Sabit Bey! When I told her people that I absolutely refused to 'cast her off,' she came rushing out of the women's apartments like a little fury, abuse upon abuse poured from her lips, until, with lacerated heart, I uttered the words that gave her back her freedom, while I swore that I would follow her wherever she went, were it to the very ends of the earth. And as though that were not enough, the very people in the market place scoffed at me, and my comrades turned me out of the Guild."

"To think I should have known nothing of all this," exclaimed the Bimbashi.

"Ah, the misery of the poor and the disgrace of the rich is always learned late," observed Emin with a bitter smile. "Oh, if I could but torment and punish my sweet beloved Raifa without causing her to shed one tear."

"A few tears would do her no harm, brother. The mouse must ever suffer for the cat; and Raifa is a little cat with uncommonly sharp claws. He! Mujo, Bairo, lazy hounds, are our horses ready at last?" And springing up from

the divan, the Bimbashi buckled on his sword, and drew Emin along with him.

"Come, brother, the world is still standing, and those whom you seek are within it. Come!"

"Whither!"

"Whither luck shall guide us." And Sabit Bey joyously switched his riding whip in the air.

"Do you recall the time, Emin, when you helped me to run away with your sister? Was it not as heavenly a day as this? Come, then, come. Once more we will stand by one another."

And he drew Emin down to the street below, where two fiery Arab steeds, impatiently pawing the ground, awaited them.

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The sun, close upon setting, was shedding its golden glory full upon that pretty little white house on the mountain slope, which had so recently figured in the Bimbashi's day dream.

Beneath a group of trees the branches of which formed as effectual a shade from the rays of the sun, as did the high encircling walls a protection from inquisitive eyes, sat two girls, their arms entwined round each other's waists.

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"Oh, Hatidja, dear sister!" said the younger of the two, the tears in her eyes shining as brilliantly as the jewels upon her person. "May I indeed be forgiven for the sorrow I have unwittingly caused you. Irresistibly I have been drawn to you, whom yet I called my enemy, to tell you that Allah's punishment had already overtaken me, and that I was far more unhappy than you."

Affectionately Hatidja smoothed Raifa's hot checks.

"Time is the healer, and Divine goodness brings us back to peace and health," she said soothingly. "You, too, must learn to submit and to know that every wish is not to be granted—that all joy is not perfect."

"But I will not submit," cried Raifa impetuously, "nor will I see you suffer any more, Hatidja. I will not."

"Therein I recognise my obedient wife, Raifa," exclaimed a threatening voice.

Terrified, the two girls looked up, and saw, standing on the garden path before them, the Bimbashi, who had stolen noiselessly up to them, and behind him a pale young soldier.

"Emin!"

The cry came from both simultaneously. But while Raifa, covering her face with both hands,

turned away, Hatidja rushed towards her brother, who clasped her in his arms.

"So here I find you!" said the Bimbashi, as with arms akimbo and frowning brow, he turned upon Raifa. "To think that you should run away like this when my back was turned. Do you not know that you will be sent to perdition for this? Disobedient wife—go where now you chose, I cast you off for ever!"

It was curious to see the joyous radiance that beamed on all faces as Sabit Bey, with considerable dignity, uttered these portentous words. The divorced wife stood for an instant with downcast head and arms crossed upon her bosom, then, turning, walked slowly away into the recesses of the garden.

The handsome Bimbashi gazed smilingly after her, then, turning to Hatidja, laid his hand upon her shoulder, and looked with pleading eyes into her grave face.

"If I come back late, I am in earnest now. The past was child's play, and sooner or later one must tire of it. Be no longer angry, come back to me, Hatidja. My house is desolate and awaits you."

A glow of happiness overspread the pale, lovely face of his wife at these words.

"Allah be praised," she said simply.

"And see, Hatidja, now that I am taking you home for the second time, we have Emin again with us."

They looked round, Emin had vanished. And now their ears caught the sound of suppressed sobs, mingled with moans and rejoicings. Close by stood the old majstor, Hadji Meho, busily engaged in wiping his eyes, and at no great distance from him the tall, gaunt person of Aunt Umihana, who, enveloped in a faded green feradjeh, her face concealed beneath a yashmak, was engaged, amid her tears, in vehemently invoking blessings upon Hatidja and the Bimbashi. The two could not repress their laughter as they saw the couple.

"So one and all have run away from me and fled to Hatidja," exclaimed Sabit Bey in high good-humour. "Just you come hither, old Umihana, and cease your weeping. Would you like to be married again to your old Hadji Meho?"

"Would I like, master? It is not so easy to bring new customs into an old village.

Hadji Meho listened attentively.

"Well, then," continued Sabit Bey, with a furtive smile, "Hatidja and our good Meho must be lenient. Humph! Neither of you will surely object to my taking Umihana to wife. Humph!"

From a side thicket there resounded a merry peal of laughter, in which Hatidja joined.

"What is there to laugh at?" stormed the Bimbashi in simulated wrath. "Love for love and cheese for gold—so is it between Umihana and me."

Umihana stood before them, pulling in embarrassed shyness at her veil, which, wet with tears, stuck to her face, thereby increasing her comical appearance. To be made the wife of a Bimbashi had never occurred to her in her wildest dreams.

"Is this true?" Hadji Meho secretly asked her in consternation.

"Of course," she returned with dignity. "One does not put butter to the fire, if one does not want it to melt."

"To-morrow," resumed the Bimbashi with great gravity, "to-morrow I will repeat before the Kadi, or whomever you may appoint, that I have chosen Umihana to wife; after which," here he manfully choked down a fit of laughter, "I purpose, nothing preventing, to restore to Hadji Meho his wife, and to Umihana her husband."

A cry of joy followed this announcement, accompanied by a chorus of laughter. Aunt Umihana had fallen half fainting into her husband's arms.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, somewhat hurt at the display of merriment, as he gently steadied his recovered wife. "Even the most creaking door does not like to be blown away by the wind."

While Hatidja was occupied in congratulating her aunt, the Bimbashi, with smiling face, was threateningly shaking his finger in the direction whence had proceeded the peal of saucy laughter.

From amid the plantation Raifa's mischievous laughing, child-face looked out at him; standing beside her was Emin, his radiant, joyous bearing plainly telling that the luck he had sought so long was found at last.

## ALI, THE DERVISH





## ALI, THE DERVISH.

"FEAR him who fears God, and fear him who fears not God, for God . . ."

The weary, smiling lips were silent, the benevolent eyes closed, and in the little low-ceiled room all was still. The rays of the setting sun played in and about the vine-covered lattice window, ever and anon the golden glory glinted into the room, and on to the bed of the dying man, lingering above his hoary head like an aureole.

"Father," whispered Ali, the youth, as he tenderly bent over the humble bed, "father, speak on."

But the lips remained mute; and again Ali crouched down on the many-hued carpet at the foot of the bed. Long he gazed at the sunken face, scanning it feature by feature; then he smoothed the long white beard, straightened the dead man's turban, and, rising with trembling knees, went into the little shop beyond.

Here a countless number of clocks of all sizes and shapes were loudly ticking; the smaller ones hanging against the wooden partition; the larger, more costly, upright ones, covered with gauze, standing ranged along the wall. On a mat were the two stools covered with the delicate tools father and son had been wont to ply so industriously; among those on the old man's stool were his spectacles and chibouque.

Going to the shop door, Ali looked out upon the narrow gloomy lane, with its busy traffic. Ah, could he but cry aloud that which oppressed his heart, how the passers-by would stare. "Ha! You people, know that Nuri Bâba (Father Nuri) has gone home to Allah. Nuri Bâba, the Wise, the like of whom is not to be found again on this earth." But the passers-by did not understand the language of mute despair in the young man's eyes. From the stone house opposite resounded the discordant sound of school-children's voices reciting a verse of the Koran after their teacher. Mule drivers were bellowing at their beasts to urge them on to quicker pace; purchasers bargaining shrilly over a para.

The youth, turning back into his shop, sat down in his accustomed seat, and buried his pale handsome face in his knees. When next he

looked up a hodja, with snow-white turban, stood before him.

"Have you come already to bear him forth?" Ali cried impulsively. "Must he too be laid in the cold dark grave?"

"Such is the will of Allah," returned the priest.

"All his wisdom, all his goodness be for ever lost? Yet he could go out into the darkness of night with a smile upon his lips!—Hodja, teach me to understand this—I would fain die as he died."

"Then must you live as he lived," replied the hodja gravely. "The death of a wise man is only to be purchased by long years of endurance, and to him who has sufficiently striven and endured, comes death as his highest reward."

The youth would fain have risen, but sank back on his knees with a groan.

"Nuri Bâba, oh, my father, dost thou hear me amid the terrors of death? What must I do to become like thee? What shall I do without thee in life—how meet death? Teach me to smile—to smile alike in life and in death!"

Compassionately the hodja looked down upon the youth.

"Think, Ali, did not the deceased leave you,

beside Holy Scripture, any word of comfort, any grain of his wisdom ? ”

With lightning flash the recollection of his father's last words came to the youth, and rising he said slowly,

“ ‘ Fear him who fears God ; and fear him who fears not God, for God ’ . . . . the end, the end ! ” cried Ali.

As he turned imploringly to the hodja, the latter, with a shake of the head, was disappearing within the door leading to Nuri Bâba's death chamber.

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The world went on its way as before, only to Ali all seemed changed. The ticking of the clocks in his little shop soon grew intolerable to him ; then came a time when he did not hear them at all, and only saw the pendulums swing noiselessly backwards and forwards, giving him the horrible dread lest he had grown deaf. The hands went round and round ; irrevocably time was speeding on ; hours, days, weeks passed, and still no ray of light had penetrated Ali's darkened brain.

Then a feeling of horror came over him. What if this should go on, year after year, until his hair should grow grey, and death approach,

and he perish in its terrors, because he had not found the path, along which Nuri Bâba, his father, had gone forth to eternal bliss. What then—what would follow? . . . .

And Ali, the youth, went forth to seek the conclusion of Nuri Bâba's last words. He passed down the long, narrow lane, familiar to him as long as he could remember anything; to right and left, in their shops, sat the men he knew so well, from whom he had been wont to receive kindly greetings as he went by holding Nuri Bâba's hand. They, surely, would be in a position to counsel him.

Yet now, when he set forth to seek some friend in whom to confide, the street suddenly seemed to have grown deserted, unfamiliar; and as he turned to former friends and acquaintances, they looked him coldly askance. Then he began to speak, at first volubly, then more and more hesitatingly, of Nuri Bâba, the wise, good father, of his own grief at his loss, and of that father's last words, the meaning of which he could not unravel, death having robbed him of the end. And people listened to him at first attentively, then, by degrees, more and more carelessly. Some even asked, "Who was Nuri Bâba?"—dead but those few weeks—others did not ask, confusing

him with some other man, also lately dead. Anon, as Ali continued speaking, they gave up listening altogether; and one began counting the day's gains into his leathern purse; another grew absorbed in looking out for customers; and a third, as he filled his pipe, remarked that the hot weather made one sleepy.

Then Ali passed on to other streets of his native town, which, though seldom traversed by him, seemed no more unfamiliar than the others; the inhabitants, although he had never before set eyes upon them, no colder than his friends had been.

Now he spoke no more of Nuri Bâba and of his own grief, but began upon other subjects more congenial to his hearers; then, with beating heart, seized the opportunity to ask: "Do you fear God?"

To which, for all answer, many an one merely laughed; others feigned not to have heard the question, and but few made any reply.

The rich merchant feared God, and prayed that his goods, coming to him from afar, might reach him in safety; that his fine house, too, might not be struck by lightning. The State functionary dreaded lest God should call him away suddenly, or send him an illness, ere he had reached the summit of his ambition. The

just tradesman feared the displeasure of God, lest through any mistake in his accounts he should have defrauded the poor of the alms allotted to them by law ; and the grandee could give no answer to the question, for great and important as he was and far above fear, he yet knew too little of his God not to dread Him. The broker looked askance ; and the beggar, groping for rags and bones, answered with a laugh : “ Fear ! Why should I fear ? If God did not mean me to be what I am, He would have made me otherwise.”

And Ali went beyond the precincts of the town, to the tillers of the ground who live in the simplicity of the Prophets, and who possibly possess more of Divine Grace than do the dwellers in cities.

“ How should we do other than fear ? ” some said. “ Must we not fear the Pasha who makes our lives a burden to us, and whom, do what we will, we cannot satisfy. Why then should we not fear God, the All Powerful, Awful One ? ”

And others said :

“ Why should we fear God ? We do no ill ; are of all people the most to be pitied ; for we lead a life of hell upon earth, yet we can bear it—why then should things be worse in the other world ? ”



"And your Pasha?" asked Ali, "is he not afraid?"

"Oh," said they, "he gives the yearly alms, and when the time comes for him to die, he will found a mosque."

Ali, the youth, turned him about, and went back the way by which he had come; and to right and left of his path, along which the solitary youth had hoped to find friends and advisers, arose voices, first low, then louder, and as he looked back he saw a crowd of street boys behind him, and heard them jeeringly mimic his words. With bitterness in his heart he reached his little shop. Here he found customers waiting. One wanted to have an old watch regulated; another had come to fetch his, and found it not ready; a third declared all the prices asked too high; finally they pronounced Ali to be too young and inexperienced to carry on his father's trade, and said he had better go out as assistant.

When the youth was left alone, he hid his face in his hands and wept. The hot tears streamed through his slender fingers, while his slim, delicate frame was literally convulsed with sobs. He did not perceive that close beside him, only separated by the window frame, a girl was standing, her bright eyes watching him from under the linen veil she wore.

"Ah, Ali!" she called at last, tapping on the glass, "save your tears, they will not mend matters."

Ali did not move, yet his sobbing ceased, and a strangely happy feeling came over him, as he recognised the voice of a former playfellow, the merry Sibija.

The next instant she had slipped into the shop.

"Listen, Ali, I am come, despite mother's prohibition, to cheer you up,—and you will not even look at me," she added in an injured tone.

Raising his head suddenly, he caught the girl trying to conceal herself in a corner of the shop, as she darted an anxious glance towards the door; the wealthy young Mushan, who attracted all the girls' attention, happened to be passing by.

Ali drooped his handsome head. "She does not want to be seen talking to the watchmaker," he thought.

"Hearken, maiden," he said bitterly. "If your mother does not approve of your coming here, why do you come? Such conduct is little befitting a girl of your age. But I suppose you fear neither your mother nor——"

He broke off. The scoffing laughter, so lately

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heard, still rang in his ears, and at his words the girl, too, broke into a peal of rippling laughter.

“Ha! ha! ha! Ali, you make eyes like the hodja in the mosque, when he sets to praying for us women on great festivals, and wants to make our grandmothers cry over us! Just you wait until I am an old woman, then I, too, will believe it all.”

And away she went.

Ali rising, went to the door, and looked after her. Her red striped shawl fluttered in the breeze as she sped along, and ere she disappeared within the doorway of the neighbouring house, she turned her laughing face to look after a lad who was boldly staring at her.

Ali pressed his lips together. Whither had fled that sudden sense of joy? The hodja passed hurriedly by; Ali seized him by his flowing garments.

“Hodja!” he implored, with voice that trembled with tears, “I am so wretched. Come in and talk to me, friend of my father!”

But the hodja shook him off. He had not a moment to spare, he would be late for service.

Did the holy man, too, fear Divine punishment if, in order to comfort one bereaved, he reached the mosque an hour later?

Mournfully Ali looked along the now darkening deserted street, with its abrupt ascent, from the summit of which the dazzlingly white walls of a mosque gleamed down upon him. As it caught the rays of the setting sun the silvery sheen of the leaden-cased minaret changed to rainbow hues ; from the courtyard of the mosque the soft evening breeze wafted a scent of roses to the solitary lad. Yet a few seconds, and the last rays of the sinking sun were followed by the solemn chant of the muezzin.

Ali shuddered.

"Oh, All-Merciful ! Not of men, but of Thee will I implore enlightenment !"

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The Bakre-Bâba Mosque, which, standing upon an eminence, was visible to the surrounding country from afar, did not belong to the faithful of that district, but to the like-named Tekch (monastery) of the primitive order of howling and dancing dervishes. The Tekch itself was a very ancient stone building, with small, heavily-barred casements. The low entrance gate, hewn out of red marble, stood open day and night to every one, whatever might be his creed. No lock to the doors of the Tekch forbade admittance to the stranger, whoever he was ; he was free to remain within

the walls of the Bakre-Bâba Tekeh, whether for hours or years, without a single question being addressed to him.

Separated from the Tekeh by its courtyard, stood the ancient white-washed mosque, with its slender minaret; almost level with the ground were the low windows, through which rose-bushes forced their way; while from out the dusky interior of the mosque there ever exhaled a mysterious, enervating perfume of incense.

In the centre of the flagged courtyard was erected a mausoleum to the memory of the pious founder of the mosque, near to which was the place of offering, where the faithful laid the simple food required by the dervishes. Closely surrounded by rose-bushes was a spring, whose refreshing waters flowed into a stone basin, ever besieged by children coming to fetch water in tall zinc pitchers. The lofty, coloured walls of the Tekeh, adorned with curious frescoes and cabalistic signs, would repeat with wondering echo the glad voices of the children; mingling with that echo would be heard the twittering of swallows under the eaves, the sound of rushing water, and the murmur of the dervishes at prayer.

Forcing a path among the encroaching rose-bushes, the way led to the vast graveyard

belonging to the Tekch, covered with white gravestones, the greater number of which had half sunk into the ground. The encircling walls were partly fallen, and through the apertures trooped children from the cottages near to fetch water from the well, who, when the holy men were at their devotions in the mosque, would cluster round the low windows, and look with inquisitive eyes into the vast interior shrouded in mystic gloom.

The devotional exercises of festival days were a sight oft recurrent, yet one ever gazed upon with mute admiration. Five times in every four-and-twenty hours did the dervishes descend the creaking wooden stairs to the courtyard, where, with whispered prayers, they performed their religious ablutions in the running water, then, with long, gliding steps vanished into the mosque for silent prayer; but at noon, upon Fridays and festivals, the function was of longer duration.

Then, closely crowded together in a wide circle, would crouch the faithful on their prayer-carpets round the kibra (altar), to the right of which sat the old Sheikh (high priest), his rosary held between his trembling fingers; high-born youths in costly garments beside dervishes in rough sackcloth; beggar boys beside well-to-

do citizens, who, through some vow, or chance, or whatever might be the cause, happened thus to be joining in the dervishes' devotional exercises.

At a sign from the sheikh the devotions began with solemn chorus, in which, in monotonous rhythm were repeated the words, "La Allah che il Allah," the dervishes swaying the upper part of their bodies from right to left in cadence with the words. A cry from the sheikh, and the chant changed from its solemn measure; ever faster and faster the words were repeated, ever higher and shriller rose the voices. Now the shout became "Allah, Allah!" At each syllable the devotees' heads, with eyelids half closed, flew from shoulder to shoulder; no longer a shout, it was a shriek; no longer a shriek, it was a howl wrung from the violently panting, heaving breasts; their faces had become livid; their fingers convulsively clutched their garments.

In the sacred night of Ramazan, when a cry from the sheikh had silenced the devotees, he, rising, would advance with solemn step into the centre of the circle. "Hû, hû, hû," would issue in hollow tones from his breast, and the dervishes, intertwining arms and clutching one another by the shoulder, would repeat the sound, turning in a circle round the sheikh. "Hû-hû—hû-u" would

resound in weird chorus, the rhythmical steps growing more and more rapid, the devotees' bodies swaying backwards and forwards in wild movement; ever harsher, ever more horror-inspiring grew the cries; ever swifter revolved the circle; steps became springs; their wide garments flapped, their turbans fell off their heads, loose strands of hair struck their ghastly faces. Ghost-like glimmered the candles in the high brass candelabra on the kibla, their feeble light not reaching to the roof of the mosque, the clouds of incense collecting in misty circle round the candles, causing the faces of the devotees to look still more distorted.

Another word of command from the sheikh, and the howling instantaneously ceased; the circle dissolved, and with silent reverent obeisance to the kibla, the devotees left the mosque. One only remained prostrate before the altar when the others had all departed.

The breeze coming in at the open windows caused the lights to flicker fantastically upon the gay-hued garments of the motionless worshipper, but it did not succeed in warning him away. For months past he had been the most fervent among the devotees; his voice the most penetrating; his the most impassioned gyration round the sheikh, the figurative centre of the universe.



The touch of a hand startled the prostrate worshipper. It was Ali, the youth, who now, his eyes glowing with fever, looked into the furrowed countenance of the aged sheikh bending over him.

Rising, he followed the venerable man through the rose-scented courtyard bathed in moonlight, without to the marble gateway of the Tekeh. At his feet, in the stillness of night, lay the town—there, with vine branches festooning its roof, stood his home, and the little shop in which he had worked beside his father. A passionate yearning came over Ali; a yearning after the Infinite, the Unattainable; a yearning after happiness and peace. Groaning in his passionate impulse, he stretched out his arms.

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Then the grey-bearded sheikh spoke to the youth. He spoke of the swaying ivy, of how when robbed of its hold, it becomes the sport of the wind. He spoke of the vain strivings of man, and of their impotence; of man's presumption and littlenesses; of his self-love and self-worship, and of the silence of the grave. And he spoke of Allah's mercies, only to be shared on earth by such as had learned to despise the earthly within them, and who,

by destroying the sinful sensual part of themselves, had become one with the Idea of God.

“For what is, and what will be, is God alone, and there is no God but the one God.”

And Ali the youth hearkened to the words with burning, fast beating heart. He thought of the loving eyes of Nuri-Bâba, the Wise; he recalled the cold-hearted men who had repulsed and scorned him, and he clung to the marble gates of the Tekkeh like a branch of ivy torn from its native soil. And whilst the youth raised his glowing eyes to the starry heavens above, the old man drooped his faded orbs mournfully to earth.

And the sweet song of the nightingale in the rose-bushes, the deep, sublime, peace-breathing silence around them, was lost alike to both.

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So Ali the youth became a dervish. The sheikh hailed him as one unusually favoured by Allah; and, in truth, the young man seemed possessed with a mighty spirit ever urging him onwards. Within a few months he knew the whole of the Koran by heart, and had received the white turban of a hafiz. The fame of his piety began to spread; the children even, who once had jeered at him, caught at the hem of

his garment, and would have humbly kissed it. But Ali gathered his coarse garments closer about him, and, when he met people, looked past them into space. In the solitude of his cell, in the gloom of the mosque, there smouldered within him something so akin to hatred of man and the world that he was terrified at himself.

The more he suppressed every feeling, every human impulse within him, the more veneration he inspired. And he felt that unswervingly, unflinchingly, he must continue on his way, would he attain to the sunny heights of wisdom.

So for nights and days Ali absorbed himself in the study of ponderous volumes filled with the crabbed hieroglyphics of Eastern sages, while the bitter joyless lines about his mouth grew deeper and more marked.

When for weeks and weeks he had been thus engaged, there would suddenly awaken within his heart that craving akin to a life-long hunger that he was powerless to still. Then he would hasten down to the mosque to weep and pray. And Nuri Bâba's image would arise before him, and he would hear the dying lips murmur: "Fear those who fear God, and fear those who fear not God——" Why did those words leave him no peace? Would he never be able to unravel them? Who could give him answer?

And again he lay prone on his prayer-carpet, when of a sudden, from the courtyard, came the sound of a clear child's voice calling :

"Fatima, oh, Fatima !"

The young dervish shuddered. It was the name of his mother, who had found an early grave, and at the sound his heart thrilled with a vague feeling of happiness, such as he had not known for many year.

"Fatima !" the child cried impatiently.

"Here am I," replied a gentle voice, close to where he lay.

Ali started up. At the east window of the mosque, half-concealed among the rose-bushes, he saw the white, delicate face of a girl, her large, marvellously brilliant eyes gazing with an expression of enthusiastic adoration upon him.

Ali would fain have moved away, but could not. As though attracted by magnetic power, he looked into those eyes, until the roses closed together again, and the face had vanished.

Minute after minute passed. Ali wrestled for composure to resume his prayer ; it came not. He recalled to his remembrance verses of the Koran, hieroglyphics of the Holy Book—in vain ! And again there came over him the maddening dread that his labour was fruitless, that Allah's

mercy was unattainable to him. There it was again, that awful feeling of void, and then such an involuntary sense of delight and happiness that he could have shouted for joy! He threw himself upon the ground, and stifled the cry of his soul. As, hours after, the voice of the muezzin was again heard calling from the minaret, Ali, rising from his tear-stained prayer-carpet, went to the old sheikh. He would tell him all, would open out his full heart, and yet he knew not what he had to tell. But ere he had opened his mouth to speak, the sheikh exclaimed:

“Brother in God, I was on my way to you. Many of the faithful are preparing to start for Mecca, and a rich man, whom Providence has stricken down with sickness, desires that you should offer up prayers at the holy Caaba in his stead. Go, and take my blessing with you!”

With feverish haste Ali made his preparations for the far journey. He would return another man from the holy pilgrimage, would find there the strength to walk on unimpeded in the path of wisdom; undisturbed by all temptation. . . .

And did the breeze chance to waft the name of Fatima from the graveyard where the children were at play in the sunshine, the poor

dervish once more would feel as perplexed, as despondent, as utterly alone as ever.

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Ali, the youth, had gone forth, and after the lapse of more than a year, Ali, the man, returned. A slight black beard covered his sunken cheeks, concealing the tightly compressed lips; an unsteady light burned in his dark eyes under the contracted brows. He had offered up prayer at the holy Caaba, had visited all the monasteries of devout dervishes on his way, thus himself carrying the fame of his piety even into the most remote parts of the East. With admiration people told of his profound knowledge of Holy Writ, of his religious zeal, his contempt for the material world. None, like him, during their religious exercises could absorb themselves in Divine contemplation; and when the others, weak mortals, their bodies no longer obeying the spirit, would fall back insensible, his powerful voice would resound like that of the prophet in the wilderness, and possessed by a wild ecstasy, he would raise his arms to heaven, remaining thus for hours and hours, as though hewn out of stone. . . .

From far and near, the words spoken of him by the sheikh, that he was divinely blessed,

came back to his ears. And the words, ever repeated, pressed the sting yet deeper into his bleeding heart. Shudderingly he saw how, in their timid veneration, people shrank more and more away from him; how he was being left to stand alone in the dark night of his life.

The more he saw of the beautiful world, the more vehemently there awoke in him the feeling of hatred towards it; and again he gathered his garments closely about him, and did he meet his fellow-man, would look away into space; until, at last, he fled back to the ancient Bakre-Bāba Tekeh, impelled thereto by an irresistible sense of yearning. When the venerable sheikh looked upon him, he shook his head disapprovingly.

“You cannot give up the world, my son! You must learn to despise it, with its vain thoughts and aims; not to hate it! You must not look up with yearning to the stars; but, in Allah’s will, look submissively down to earth. You must be a man, strong as a lion, guileless as a child, then will Allah direct the rays of his mercy’s sun into your heart to enlighten and give it warmth!”

Ali’s soul quivered at these words, but he had an iron will. Once more he absorbed himself in the study of huge volumes, numbing his

soul in long night-watches, and when the spirit, fairly worn out, sunk its wings, he deemed self conquered, and rejoiced aloud. Now the phantom came no more ; no more did it appear at the window of the mosque ; no more look with him into the pages of the holy Books. Slowly the hope again rose within him that, in Allah's mercy, he might follow in the spiritual footsteps of Nuri-Bâba, the Beloved ; and, in so doing, solve the riddle of life. And again he lay prostrate before the kibra, again the scent of roses wafted in at the low windows, the slanting rays of the sun painted golden paths across the gloom of the silent mosque, and with deep draughts the dervish breathed in the peace of God's world. Ha ! What has made him start up ? The dreaded phantom, there it is again. Gazing in among the rose-branches, with face so deathly pale, eyes lifeless, weary unto death, in which lay a whole world of suffering and love.

Like one possessed he rushed to the window. Nothing was there. He shook the frail wooden lattice ; leaning out, he thrust aside the branches — nothing !

In deep silent peace the graveyard lay stretched before him ; from the neighbouring cottages light columns of smoke ascended towards the blue sky ; and, in the distance amid



the confusion of happy children's voices, it was to the poor watcher as though he heard the mocking cry :

"Fatima, oh, sister Fatima !"

With a crash the structure of godliness, which the unhappy man with such unspeakable anguish had reared about him, kneading it, as it were, with his heart's blood, fell to the ground.

The world, that, to him, cruel, unknown world, why would it not loose its hold of him ? Had it not, itself, set him apart, saying :

"Look at the holy man, he is none of us."

Ali, the Dervish, wrung his hands in anguish of spirit. To him, Allah was no longer the All-Merciful, but the hard, angry taskmaster ; and on despondency followed fear.

"Fear him, who fears God," Nuri-Bâba had said.

Pale and rigid, Ali looked towards the window in the eastern wall of the mosque, drops of cold sweat standing upon his brow. So he sat unconscious whether he were waking or dreaming.

Slow, shuffling footsteps approached. The mosque gradually filled with figures in coarse garments, wearing the green turbans of dervishes on their hoary heads. One of them, separating himself from the rest of the solemn, silent group, stood before Ali.

"Peace be with you, and the blessing of God, my brother!" he began. "Our wise leader, our sheikh has, by the will of Allah, even now been called to Paradise, and the Brothers have chosen you, the most devout among us, to be our Head."

Ali moved not. Not a muscle of his rigid face stirred. Now drawing near, all these venerable, grey-bearded men bent humbly over the hand of this their youngest brother, and kissed the hem of his kaftan.

And slowly, insensibly, while this proceeded the eyes of Ali, the sheikh of Bakre-Bâba Tekch sank from the green embowered window until they rested on the ground; and he took the oath never again to raise those eyes to earthly things, but, resigned to the will of Allah, to endure with manly courage to the end, walking along the thorny path of Wisdom.

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The dervishes of Bakre-Bâba Tekch judged well when they chose Ali to be their sheikh. If hitherto the faithful had come gladly and oft to look on the pious dervish on whom the grace of Allah so manifestly rested, they now streamed thither in shoals, heaping the place of offering with their gifts; and far and wide

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throughout the land spread the Tekeh's fame, as the Rock of Faith. The doubting grew strengthened after joining in prayer with the sheikh in the ancient mosque; the sick recovered health, if they did but touch his garments; and did anyone, heart-sore, gaze into the calm, unfathomable eyes of the devout man, straightway he regained strength to take up his burden again.

Yes, they had grown calm, those once far-off yearning, flashing eyes. No longer brooding thoughtfully, Ali now sat pondering the holy Books; peacefully he would go five times daily, between sunrise and sunset, into the dim ancient mosque, with eyes ever sunk to earth, to close them tight when passing by that window in the eastern wall. Yet, notwithstanding, never did he pass it, but that he saw shimmering through the green foliage without, something white, like the sweet, pale face of a girl.

Then would he experience a gentle pang at his heart; although he had thought to have overcome self and the world.

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Years passed on, and Ali, the sheikh, had become a veteran.

The world went its way, and the veteran

pursued his steadfast path, though now with tottering steps and sunken eyes. And as the former aged sheikh had spoken to him, so now he spake to those youths who sought his help.

"Cling to the supports of Faith, oh, ye ivy tendrils, blown hither and thither with the wind. Be comforted, the All-Merciful will take pity on you also. Do not despair, but go on with good courage to the heights, where the Sun of Righteousness will enlighten you!"

Young men, as they heard him, raised their aspiring eyes to the very stars, whilst his were sunk to earth; while the fire of enthusiasm glowed in their countenances, his bore an expression of bitterness and mournful resignation; while they thought of the future, he thought upon death.

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So came the time when Ali, the Sage, lay dying. The people, without, waited in grief and sorrow; the Sage, within, lay silently awaiting the enlightenment, the solution of his life's problem.

And as week by week, day by day, he lay thus waiting, there came over him once more, at the close of his long journey, the old sense of discouragement.

Then suddenly, one day, there arose a sound of wailing within the ancient Tekkeh.

"Oh, Allah, turn from us the threatened misfortune! Bring to nought the evil omen! The eastern wall of the mosque has fallen asunder."

When Ali, the sheikh, heard these words, as though invested with superhuman strength, he rose up, and hastened down into the midst of the wailing throng.

"Has the hour come, oh Allah, in which thou dost draw away the veil from me? Dare I now look upon Thee in Thy mercy?"

The wall had given way, rent asunder in the middle. Bent back beneath the ruins lay the rose-bush, and close beside where the window had been, stood the white gravestone of a woman.

With outstretched arms, the Sage rushed towards it.

"It is the grave of Fatima, the holy maid, who died so young," the people whispered, in low voices one to another.

The stone bore an inscription, and as the Sage with his dying eyes deciphered it, he uttered a cry of joy—appalling, sublime.

"Thus one last ray of sunshine is to beautify my life! Oh, fool that I was to desire to gaze upon the Divine, ere I had known the human.

Blind fool that I was to turn from my God, when it was He who was knocking at the door of my heart ! And yet despite all, oh, Thou All-pitying one, Thou hast had compassion even on me !”

“Take heed, ye men,” cried Ali, the Sage, “take heed ! When Nuri-Bâba, the Wise, closed his eyes in death, his last words were, ‘Fear him who fears God, and fear him who fears not God, for——’”

The voice of the Sage broke. Clinging to Fatima’s gravestone, he sank on to the fragrant grass, covering the inscription with his body. So he died ; death silencing the words upon his lips : “For God is love, and will have nothing but love.”

And the noble features of Ali, the hoary-headed sheikh, were transfigured by a blissful radiant smile, such as they had never known in life.

“See, how a holy man dies,” the people said with awe-struck voices.

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They had heard the beginning of Nuri-Bâba’s legacy, but they had not read its conclusion from Fatima’s grave.



# THE MATCH-MAKING FERADJEH





## A MATCH-MAKING FERADJEH.

IN the great cool corridor of her house Shuhreta Khanum, the worthy widow of the late Ibrahim Kaimak, crouched meditatively before the sofra (coffee stool) upon which stood her mid-day meal. Mechanically her red-tipped fingers toyed with the contents of a dish whence issued the pungent aroma of onions, whilst her lips murmured numbers, from which it may be surmised that the fair widow was engaged in calculation.

“My mother said,” she murmured to herself, “that I was born on the day Kader, in the month of Ramazan, and that Ramazan that year fell in spring—that is why I was named Shuhreta Kadrija—and Hadji Muhamed says that Ramazan will not fall again on that day for forty years. This year it comes in summer, so I must be—” and she set to reckoning again, this time with the aid of her fingers. “Thirty—impossible! Hadji Muhamed must be mistaken,

or is he only saying it, the old camel, on purpose to make me more disposed to marry him? But I will show him that he is mistaken. The idea of wanting to make me out so old. I am sure I look every bit as young as my step-daughter, and she, I believe, is but sixteen. Besides I am far handsomer than that lack-daisical, yellow-faced stick of a girl. Rifat really has no sense! True, he has not seen me yet; how can I contrive to give him a good look at me? He is so shy," and she sank into deep thought, suffering the smoking onions to grow cold the while. A triumphant self-conscious smile lay on her not unpleasing features, when a door was flung open, evidently in great haste, and a girl, attired in gala costume, came out into the corridor.

"A-a-ah!" exclaimed Ibrahim Kaimak's widow, angrily starting up. "What do you mean by this, Shuhreta? Your new yellow dimlija with the red roses. Off with them instantly. Do you hear?"

"But I cannot go to the Mehmedinza Softitshka's teferitch in the old dimlija I wear in the kitchen," timidly remonstrated the stick, in other words a fair, slender maiden, just then engaged in daintily nestling a few dahlias in her little fez.

"You have others. These are to be kept for Bairam. I cannot be always buying you new ones. You will ruin me," exclaimed the saving step-mother petulantly.

"Then, indeed, I will not wear them again until Bairam," Shuhreta ventured to plead after a pause. "Girls will all be wearing their newest things to the teferitch (picnic) to-day."

"No matter. Off with them!" commanded the widow.

Now the girl broke into a paroxysm of angry tears. To have to go in old washed-out clothes for the other girls to make fun of her—and to be seen in such shabby attire by Rifat—no, never!

"I will tell Uncle Muhamed Aga that I am not allowed to put on the yellow dimlija he gave me, while you are wearing yours every day, and will soon have worn them in holes," she gasped out between her angry sobs.

"Yes, I can afford it," said the widow calmly, as she lit a cigarette.

"It is not true. I have just as much money as you, and you never give me a para of it. I will tell uncle, he is my guardian," she said, wiping away her tears with her sleeves.

"Shuhreta, I know one way by which you could buy yourself as many new dimlijas as

you chose, without having to ask me," said the Ibrahimza in an altered tone. "Marry!"

The girl coloured violently, her eyes sparkled.

"Oj Matshuha! (step-mother) if only you would let me."

"Certainly," was the reply, as the widow luxuriously emitted the smoke of her cigarette. "Why should I not allow you to marry Hadji Muhamed Aga? He is rich, respected—"

But the maiden listened no longer. Laughing like a mad thing, she danced about the corridor.

"Uncle Muhamed! Ha ha ha! He is three times as old and three times as gawky as I am. But now I am off, or I shall be too late. How they will all laugh at the teferitch when I tell them your joke." And snatching up a red striped shawl, she twisted it round her head, and was going out at the door.

"Stay!" shrieked the Ibrahimza angrily, "I am in earnest. You dare to laugh at anything I say again. Your father was not so much younger than Hadji Muhamed, when I married him, and I was considerably prettier than you."

"That may be," retorted Shuhreta furiously. "All the more reason that you should marry uncle now. It is you and not me that he wants; he knows which is the more suitable for him."

For a moment the widow was speechless with wrath, but she controlled herself.

"Shuhreta, I have already told you that I am in earnest. Muhamed is not so bad; and an elderly husband is better than a young one, for he is not likely to do so many stupid things, and one does not need to be looking after him so much. Besides, Muhamed will allow his wife plenty of bachmalek (pin money), and if you marry him I will give you a thousand ducats."

Shuhreta smiled in a superior manner.

"Sometimes young people are wiser than their elders," she observed sarcastically. "Rifat tells me that my father left me five thousand ducats, which you will have to hand over to me when I marry."

"Who told you that?" asked the Ibrahimza, her face scarlet with rage.

The girl hesitated.

"Rifat Effendi," she said at last, in some confusion.

"Indeed!" exclaimed her step-mother slowly. "Then you may tell your Rifat that your father did not say when and whom you were to marry, but left that to me and your guardian, Uncle Muhamed. You will stay here," she said authoritatively, as she saw that the girl was

about to slip away ; "or perhaps Rifat is waiting outside for you," she added scornfully.

"Would not you be glad if Rifat were waiting for *you*, though he is so young and stupid?" retorted the girl in the same tone. "But he has no wish to marry anyone so—clever as you."

The Ibrahimza vouchsafed no spoken reply ; plunging her hands under the sofra, the next instant her right arm had made such a significant swoop in the air that Shuhreta, the younger, felt instinctively impelled to duck her head, and without loss of time to fling open the nearest door within which to retreat. But ere she could cross the threshold a black oblong object had flown over her head.

Shuhreta looked about her. She was in her step-mother's bed-chamber, hitherto forbidden territory to her. Save for Turkish divans, the furniture and fittings were exclusively European, wardrobes, tables, and chairs seeming to have been picked up at promiscuous auctions ; showing, moreover, by their arrangement, that the owner had but little notion of their proper use. On a cabinet, symmetrically placed between sundry coffee-cups, were a pair of new house shoes and a wide open sunshade, both evidently supposed by the lady of the house to be some choice form of decoration. Although the room

looked on to the street, mushembaks (lattice blinds) were conspicuous by their absence, the windows being hung with curtains, which blew out so merrily in the wind, that they offered not the slightest protection from the inquisitive gaze of passers-by.

Shuhreta's eyes searched the well-scoured floor for the missile aimed at her, but in vain. Then perceiving that all the windows were wide open, she grew terrified.

"Matshuha," she said, turning to her step-mother, who, considerably subdued, stood beside her. "Matshuha, I think your new patent leather shoe must have flown out at the window." And they looked at each other in dismay.

"Let us see," exclaimed the widow resolutely.

At that moment the wind, favoured by the draught caused by the open door, caught the curtains, and sent them whirling out at the window. The parapet was unusually low, and people across the road seemed to be standing looking up into the room; thus, without being seen they could neither retreat to shut the door, nor advance to the window. So, following the tactics of all Turkish women, they threw themselves flat upon the floor.

"I must see where the shoe has gone,"



muttered the widow, despair in her heart. "Shuhreta, near you, beside the mangal (brazier), lie the tongs. Stretch out your hand for them, and then in Allah's name, let us crawl forward to the window, and you try, with the tongs to draw in the unlucky curtains."

It was accomplished, and after a few minutes, each was convulsively clutching at a corner of the curtains, while the Ibrahimza, craning her neck, peeped down into the street. But scarce had she looked down, then letting go her hold of the curtain, she had clasped her hands in horror above her head.

"Mashallah! Oh, misfortune upon misfortune! Shuhreta, my daughter—the Pasha—the Pasha has gone by, and the shoe must have struck him on the head. There, quite close to our house, he has stopped, and is talking to some one; his servant is carrying some object in his hand; true, his back is turned towards me, but I do believe it is my shoe. Oh, woe, woe!"

Shuhreta, meanwhile, was glancing with sparkling eyes across at the opposite house, before which a curious looking, geometrical figure was standing. It was that of a young man of abnormal height, wearing Frankish dress, which was both too short and too tight for him. Crowning the long collarless

neck was a head, seemingly intent upon resisting the tendency to be drawn forward by the weight of an unusually well-developed nose. His hands were buried in the pockets of his long coat, and under one thin arm, pressed flat to his side, he held an umbrella, which, falling horizontally to the vertical line of his body, lent him a certain resemblance to an imperfect triangle.

Shuhreta looked down, the interesting youth looked up, inquisitively, not at her, hidden as she was behind the curtain, but at her insanely gesticulating step-mother. And this angered the fair, young beauty; for it was Rifat—her Rifat, upon whom all her hopes were set, who was one day to elevate her to the rank of Kaimakamin (district magistrate's wife). In great vexation she pulled at her step-mother's dimlija.

"But, Matshuha, come away from the window," she whispered. "People can see you, and will think that you threw your shoe intentionally at the Pasha's head."

"Mashallah, how can people think such a thing? It is not true," sobbed the Ibrahimza.

And now both began to retreat in the before named method, looking like a couple of gigantic orange-hued tortoises as they crawled away;

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the perspiration, streaming from the Ibrahimza's forehead at this unaccustomed mode of progression, mingling freely with the tears of fright that fell from her eyes. Having arrived at the refuge of the cool corridor, Shuhreta, the younger, seating herself thoughtfully before the sofra began, mechanically, eating the cold onions; while Shuhreta, the elder, gasping for breath, ran from one end of the passage to the other, like a caged lioness.

"What shall I do?" she panted, in despairing accents. "Oh, if only the Pasha is unharmed—else—"

"Come, come," said Shuhreta, soothingly. "A blow from a shoe is not likely to kill anyone. I know that from experience."

The Ibrahimza repaired to the washing place to perform her abdest (ablutions), then covering her head with a light veil, turned in the direction of Mecca to offer up an ejaculatory prayer.

"Silence! You are a silly girl. A Pasha is not like any ordinary person, and if you had but held your tongue, as I bade you, the misfortune would never have happened. Now it will be your fault if our lives are in danger," she exclaimed hurriedly; then, placing herself in position, began, "Allah is the one and only Allah. Allah's word is the highest."

"What rubbish you talk," broke in Shuhreta, derisively. "Is it my fault that you have taken down the mushembaks from the windows, and that you throw your Frankish shoes about? Is this the way a decorous Turkish woman behaves? I know very well it is because Rifat wears Frankish dress, and says the woman he marries must be as clever as an Osmanlinka, that you must needs use a parasol, and go about wearing kid gloves and patent leather shoes."

To this no answer was received. Ibrahim Kaimak's widow, at that moment, having prostrated herself on the floor.

"Oh, Allah! preserve me from misfortune and sorrow. Suffer me to come to thee in thy Paradise!"

"But I tell you that he does not want you, because he means to marry me," continued Shuhreta. "A woman may be clever and yet have mushembaks to her windows; and if the Pasha does punish you, it will only serve you right."

The Ibrahimza, crossing her arms over her bosom, bowed low.

"I shall not hang alone," she remarked in angry parenthesis; then resumed, "There is only one Allah. All must perish deprived of the light of his countenance."

"At any rate, I shall not be with you," said the girl with a derisive laugh. "Just you try to deny it. Why, Rifat saw you looking after the Pasha."

Now the widow remained longer than seemed necessary in her prostrate attitude, and when she rose, her prayers had evidently come to an end, for, visibly edified, she squatted down beside Shuhreta.

"Hearken, my daughter, be sensible," she began.

"That I shall always be, for Rifat—"

"Then, at any rate, leave off talking. If I am punished, neither will you escape. Had you been obedient, the offence had not been committed. As it is, you will not only have to bear the penalty of your disobedience, but of the serious consequences which that disobedience has brought about. You say, the Imam has forbidden the use of Frankish objects? Very well, I shall be punished, but so will you for having known, and not informed against me." Shuhreta's face grew visibly longer. "And Rifat cannot help you, for, compared with the Pasha, he is but as a gnat," concluded the Ibrahimza, well nigh triumphantly.

And now the girl's composure had entirely given away.

"Oj Matshuha!" cried she, bursting into tears, "what shall we do? Do think what is best to be done."

"I have got you now," thought the amiable step-mother. "I should not be the clever Shuhreta, if I could not contrive to shift all the blame on to your shoulders. Now let the Kadi question me."

"H'm—send neighbour's Hamid for Hadji Muhamed," she said thoughtfully.

"Hamid went to the teferitch ages ago with his sister. Oh, the teferitch!" and the girl sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

Shuhreta, the elder, sat puffing out clouds of smoke, appalling in their density.

"Well, the Pasha will not send the zaptiehs (soldiers) so immediately to the house," she began, giving vent to her reflections, after much weighty thought. "We are a family of position. He will probably first send us a written document, and as the Kadis are not very expeditious about such things, it will scarcely be delivered before to-morrow morning, thus giving us time to ride over to our village, where we will remain for the present. Perhaps the Pasha may forget us if we are not found at once; or he may die—who can tell? Anyway it will be better so, than to let ourselves be taken off

to prison to-morrow morning. Hadji Muhamed had promised to look in to-day, he must make himself useful. Meanwhile let us pack up everything. The zaptiehs might be prying about."

The two women now set to work with feverish activity. They dragged out the furniture from every room, scattered the contents of boxes and chests, heaping everything, one upon another, in the middle of the corridor. Then they endeavoured to sort them by means of dragging all apart again; finally rolling up divan covers into bundles with silken wraps, kitchen cloths with muslin curtains, only to scatter all in confusion again.

This occupation naturally took up many hours, and just as they were about to separate the articles for the third time, it suddenly struck the Ibrahimza that Aksham (evening) was long past, and Hadji Muhamed had not appeared. And now the courageous widow began to lose the composure, sustained hitherto with so great difficulty.

"Oh, Mashallah!" she lamented. "How vile, how ungrateful are men! Muhamed must have heard of our trouble; and is thinking we may get out of it as best we can."

The two passed the night amid alternate

lamentations and mutual attempts at consolation; and when the sun rose, all their pearls and ducats were sewn into their bodices, and they were sitting upon their corded packages, like Marius upon the ruins of Carthage.

"Oh, Shuhreta!" moaned the Ibrahimza. "You see, not a soul comes to offer us help; and we dare not ask it of anyone; for it may be of advantage to us to deny the whole affair. Nor may we longer delay. So, put on the old feradjeh,\* run to Meho's Khan, and hire two saddle and five pack horses, with a man to lead them, and we will start as soon as possible."

"The old feradjeh?" exclaimed the girl in consternation. "Impossible, Matshuha. It will scarcely hold together, and is so long that I am always treading on it and stumbling."

"Anyway, it will completely cover your yellow dimlija, and were the zaptiehs to recognise you, they would take you to prison."

"But, Matshuha, you know I have never gone out into the street in a feradjeh. I know I shall fall over it. Let me, at least, have the new one."

The distant beating of a drum here caught

\* Feradjeh, wide enveloping garment worn by Mohammedan women in the street.



the Ibrahimza's ear, causing her to turn white as death.

"Now Allah be merciful to us!" she cried, trembling. "That must be the tellal (town crier) summoning the guilty persons to make themselves known. The Pasha may have forgotten the number of our house. Quick, my daughter, run across and hear what he is crying; then hasten to bring the horses."

And flinging the ugly old patched feradjeh over Shuhreta, she fastened the yashmak so tightly across her face that the girl could scarcely see, then pushed her out at the back door into the street.

Shuhreta hastened after the sound of the drum, battling, as she went, with the hated feradjeh; and before she was aware, found herself being carried along towards the Charshija in the midst of a mob of the faithful, old and young; the latter, especially, whistling and shouting in very un-Oriental manner, and very much as the international street boy is wont to do in all countries when forming the advance guard of a military band.

Shuhreta glanced back. Yes, the band was just turning the corner of the street, followed by various companies of infantry, in black uniforms and red pojas, who, tired, dust-stained,

and hungry, were going back to barracks from Taly (manœuvres).

A load fell from Shuhreta's heart. Allah be praised! It had been the tom-tom of the soldiers they had heard, not that of the tellal. So, with lightened heart, on she marched, with the crowd. First, because it amused her; secondly, because she could not get out of it. And now the band began playing with redoubled vigour; the lung powers of those surrounding her rose to an incredible pitch; the throng grew denser and denser, and Shuhreta's whole energies became concentrated on saving her feradjeh from being trodden under foot.

"Holy Ak-Shamlseddin!" exclaimed a voice behind her. "It is unpardonable that thou shouldst have discovered these horrible instruments! The fellows are trumpeting as if it were the Day of Judgment."

"But I am under the impression that you used to like them," returned a second, somewhat diffident voice, at sound of which Shuhreta twisted clean round, for it was her Rifat who thus replied.

Close behind her strode the living triangle, under one arm an umbrella, under the other a roll of papers, precisely as his companion was carrying those objects; for little Vejsil Effendi

was the model Rifat aspired to copy in every particular.

"Holy Ben-Fasl! thus say only mine enemies!" cried Vejsil Effendi, annoyed at Rifat's remark. "It is a calumny! Imagine my ever taking pleasure in anything in this barbaric country! Perhaps I enjoy these atrocious cobble-stones too? Oj, oj! Now that wretched boy has trodden on my foot with his clumsy wooden shoes. The whole three years that I was in Constantinople such a thing never happened to me; there, people are far too well bred."

"But——"

"But what? I tell you, even as a little boy, I had a horror of Bosnian habits and ways. It was born in me. The more one lives among this barbarous race, the more barbarous and ill-mannered one becomes. That is why I never would go to school; and when my father had me taught the kanum\* by a Bosnian music-master, I howled, until he gave it up. I was not going to be turned into a savage. And I hold that it was very praiseworthy on my part."

"So it was, but——"

"Preserve us, Allah!" cried Vejsil, stopping his ears. "They call this music here. And

\* Psaltery—an instrument much played by Bosnians of high degree.

these boys! If only I could get out of this mob!" he spluttered. "I tell you what, Rifat, never in my life have I heard music but once, and then it was in Constantinople. I once went to a theatre there. Have you any idea what a theatre is like? Yes?—Well, it is something stupendous. There one sees nothing but lovely maidens, attired like Albanians, only that their dresses are of softest silken gauze, and they do not wear papooshes. Ah——

"Neath Heaven's eye since earth's creation  
There ne'er was seen such fascination."

"I say, Vejsil," quoth his long companion, with unfeigned admiration, "you are a poet."

"I assure you, I cannot help it," returned the loquacious little man. "If you go into a Constantinople theatre, you will simply rave."

"What nonsense," said Rifat, with an incredulous laugh. "My sweetheart sings beautifully too; I hear her every day; but I do not rave about her singing."

The little Effendi shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Pah! Who said they sang? That is much too commonplace for them; they express their feelings with rhythmic movement. Singing may be all very well for your

Pretty and chaste  
Bosnian Aische!"

"But, Vejsil, her name is Shuhreta. Have you forgotten it again?" asked the long one reproachfully.

"It was but for sake of the rhyme—Shuhreta, is it? Pretty name! The owner must be about as bewitching as that bundle of rags before us—eh? It's a sweet fashion that of yours in Bosnia;" and he pointed laughingly to Shuhreta, who, still walking on immediately before them, had not lost a word of their conversation.

"Grandiloquent fool!" thought she. "He is like the frog who wanted to let himself be beaten, because he had once heard tell of it, and Rifat listens to his words as if they were those of the Prophet. How I wish that Vejsil would take himself off, that I might ask Rifat's advice about our unlucky affair."

"My Shuhreta is young and beautiful, and she before us must be old and ugly, as one can see from her figure," Rifat was saying, meanwhile. "Besides, my Shuhreta does not go veiled in the street yet, because, like a servant, she has to run errands for her wicked step-mother."

"Then why do you not marry her?"

"H'm! Have I not told you a hundred times already, Vejsil?"

"As a judge, I can never hear a case too often, in order to deliver right judgment," returned Vejsil Effendi sententiously.

"Then listen! It is an intricate affair—the widow wants to marry me herself, and if, instead of her, I marry her step-daughter, she will not give the latter one para of dowry. The guardian, on the other hand, wishes to marry the widow, hence it is to his advantage that his ward should be penniless; and I doubt not but that he will manage to effect it. Now, what have I to keep a wife upon? My parents are poor, and I, as yet, have no ajluk (salary). If you would but talk it over with Hadji Muhamed, Vejsil! You are a full-fledged judge, and, by some artifice, can easily frighten him, so that he become willing to pay out Shuhreta's inheritance."

"Yes—true—h'm!" returned Vejsil, meditatively. "It might be done. In Constantinople I have unravelled far more intricate cases to my own complete satisfaction; and, as you know, I am very hard upon myself. But as for this Hadji Muhamed, the fellow is so ill-mannered and always 'thou's' me, as if I were any other Bosnian like himself, that I greatly prefer to give him a wide berth. See, Rifat, there he is, sitting in his dukian (shop). How would it

be if we crossed to the other side? Else he will be calling to us, and we shall have to squat like peasants in the open street, and drink his thick coffee with him. We can force a way through here, and let the crowd pass us. Come, Rifat."

But this was not to Shuhreta's mind. Turning therefore, she tried to intercept Rifat, in order to make him some sign. Rifat, however, from his sublime height, looked over her head, the crowd behind pressed forward, thus it came to pass that all at once Shuhreta felt an unwelcome foot trampling on her feradjeh. A hasty movement to free it on her part, an audible rent threatening to sever the very last threads of the garment, a coming together of the two actors in the fray, a stumble, and in touching proximity Shuhreta and Rifat lay in the road, to the delight of the crowd. And as the long Effendi wrathfully sprang up, the handle of his umbrella, still convulsively grasped by him, caught in the girl's yashmak, all but tearing it from her face.

"I entreat you, make haste out of this," said Vejsil hurriedly, as he forcibly dragged Rifat away, "or we shall have the old woman abusing you. I wish you had seen the smart orange-coloured dimlija protruding from the gaping feradjeh," he added, laughing.

"Vejsil!" exclaimed Rifat, stopping short in dismay, "orange-coloured, did you say?"

"Yes, with red roses."

"Mother of Moses!" groaned the long one. "There is but one such pair of dimlijas; and they are worn by Ibrahim Kaimak's widow. I saw her in them at her window yesterday."

Vejsil looked back.

"You may be right," he said. "The person in question has even now crossed over to Hadji Muhamed's shop. You have done a pretty piece of business. Just you stand behind this wood-stack, so that they do not see you, and I will stay here. I am greatly interested to see what the pair will be about."

Rifat, as usual, obeyed, while Vejsil, rolling himself a cigarette, proceeded to stroll leisurely up and down.

Meanwhile, Shuhreta, in sorry plight, had picked herself up, and fled to the other side of the street. She was engaged in gathering together the tattered feradjeh, and in drawing the yashmak over her face again, when a droning voice, in deepest bass tones, accosted her:

"Mashallah, girl, what have you been about? What a figure you look!"

Frightened to death she looked up, and saw



that she was standing exactly in front of Hadji Muhamed's shop, where he was sitting with legs crossed, like an angry god, enveloped in the clouds of smoke emitted from his narghileh.

"Uncle—I—I wanted to hear what the tellal said," she stammered in confusion.

The enormous yellowish-white turban nodded with steady movement.

"The tellal? And what did he say?"

"Nothing; we were afraid he would say something——"

She stopped.

He went on gravely nodding in silence.

"You know—about the Pasha," she continued.

"H'm," he observed, and his cunning little eyes looked sharply at her.

Shuhreta trembled.

"We were waiting for you yesterday, uncle," she began, hesitatingly, "and we know why you did not come."

"Indeed?"

Hadji Muhamed was uncommonly surprised, for, as it happened, it was more than he knew himself.

"But what people are saying is not all true," explained Shuhreta.

"No?"

"No, indeed not," she asserted. "Matshuha

did not intentionally throw the shoe at the Pasha's head; but, in turning out the room yesterday it accidentally fell out of the window as he was passing."

The hadji nodded, but this time with understanding. A slight pause ensued.

"You are both very much afraid of the Pasha?" he said.

Sighing, Shuhreta acquiesced.

"You believe that he will have both your heads cut off?"

Another mournful sigh.

"H'm, that is bad," said he struggling to speak gravely; and stroked his long grey beard to hide a smile. "And who has been doing this to your feradjeh? It is slit from top to bottom," he added, changing the subject. "Was it the Effendi over there?"

Shuhreta looked across.

"No, not he, but——" she stopped, embarrassed.

"Someone else then?" enquired her uncle.

"Yes, Rifat Effendi. He stumbled over it."

"Humph! Do you know that the Matshuha will give you a beating for this when you get home? That feradjeh is a prized heirloom. It belonged to her grandmother."

At this new prospect, Shuhreta grew first hot then cold.

"You will have to sue Rifat Effendi for damages."

"Oh, no, uncle," she implored in dismay.

Both were silent for a while.

"Shuhreta," Hadji Muhamed began afresh, as with an air of importance he laid aside the tube of his narghileh, "Shuhreta, would you rather not have a beating when you get home?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied with deep conviction.

"Nor be beheaded either?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

"And would you like to marry Rifat Effendi?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" she cried fervently.

"If you really wish this, all you have to do is not to contradict me," he said deliberately.

"What is your name?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"Shuhreta Kaimak. What else should it be?"

"Very good. Tell that to everyone who asks you; moreover, you must agree to everything I say, and speak not a word beyond answering what you are asked, or —— do you understand?"

"Yes, yes, uncle."

"Then wait here until I call you."

And rising, he descended from his shop, and with his slippered feet made for the other side of the road. It was comical to see his long,

stork-like legs with their huge papooshes (slippers) turning inwards as he pompously moved along, his long blue caftan rhythmically waving like a sail outspread at every step.

Vejsil Effendi gloated over the sight.

"I say, Rifat," he exclaimed half aloud to the friend in hiding behind his wooden barricade, "I believe the fun is beginning. Here is Hadji Muhamed steering straight across to me with camel-like tread. I will seize the opportunity to try whether I can secure your fair one for you *cum* dowry. What will you give me if I succeed? I do not ask more than does the Sultan: one tenth."

"All right," was the reply. "Only you must manage to squeeze out a good round sum."

"Done."

Now, the Effendi, assuming a careless bearing, turned his back upon Hadji Muhamed, by this time within speaking distance, and affected not to see him.

"*Merhaba*, Effendi!" was the pious salutation of the pilgrim of Mecca.

Little Vejsil, slowly turning, measured the big hadji from the tassel of his fez to the point of his slippers, then, in European fashion, deigned him a careless nod.

"And what may you be wanting?" he asked.

"Hadji, we would speak with you upon a matter, by which you can easily make your hundred ducats," replied Muhamed Aga, going straight to the mark.

Vejsil pricked up his ears. The introduction was quite to his taste, but he did not suffer this to be perceived.

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?" he asked brusquely, as though this Bosnian form of speech were new to him.

"Why 'we'—we, Hadji Muhamed Aga," returned the other pointing to himself, astonished at his interlocutor's density.

"Oh, you," replied Vejsil with a drawl, emphasising the "you," his tone, however, making not the slightest impression upon the non-sensitive ear of his auditor. "If it will not take too long, you can acquaint me with the case," he added with cool reserve, glancing at his watch as he spoke. "We will walk up and down while you talk; I must have exercise; I sit too much at the Chancellery."

For a considerable time the hadji had been silently sailing along beside him, his hands behind his back, clearly embarrassed how to make a beginning. Vejsil, on his part, observing the identical tactics that the hadji had so successfully carried out with regard to his niece, enveloped

himself in forbidding magisterial dignity, and waited for his companion to begin.

"Kadija, I have come to you because I consider you of all judges, the most competent to carry this matter to a successful issue," the hadji at length began, and speaking with his customary deliberation. "I am a widower, and am desirous to marry again—in fact, to marry my brother's widow, in order that his property may not fall into the hands of a stranger. The widow, too, was of the same mind, but—like most women, with their lack of common-sense—she must needs, all at once, grow enamoured of the Frankish dress of one of your colleagues, and, now, would not half object to squander my father's heritage upon a half-starved Effendi."

Little Vejsil, who, for some time past, had been secretly turning up his nose at his companion, now darted him a furious glance, but kept silence.

"Now this Effendi has no mind to marry the widow, but is in love with her step-daughter—my brother's child—hence you will readily understand, Kadija, my anxiety that his marriage with her should take place speedily."

The Effendi was somewhat perplexed ; he could not make out what the hadji was aiming at. Therefore again he made no answer ; contenting himself with a low neutral growl.

"I should think nothing of handing you one hundred ducats, if you would bring about this marriage, Kadija."

"But how? You must be more explicit."

"Young Effendi," whispered the old man confidentially, "you must have been witness to the manner in which Rifat Effendi, for it is he of whom I speak, knocked down a Turkish woman just now and tore her feradjeh. Well, that woman was she."

"What she?"

"Shuhreta, the younger."

"Is there another Shuhreta then?" asked Vejsil, growing more attentive.

"Of course there is. Ibrahim Kaimak's widow bears the same name."

The little Effendi snapped his fingers in high glee.

"Just you wait, you old horse of the desert," thought he, "I have not promised myself some fun for nothing. They shall all make acquaintance with the acumen of Vejsil Effendi, student of law in Constantinople."

In a trice he had become amiability itself.

"Oh, certainly, my dear hadji," was the warm response. "Consider me entirely at your service. Perhaps you will kindly give me a few hints how to start the matter. You are a man of such experience."

The "old horse of the desert" grinned amiably.

"The facts of the case are simply these, Kadija. Rifat, in his clumsiness, nearly pulled the feradjeh off the girl's back, and all but tore the yashmak from her face—that is the consequence," he interjected confidentially—"of a man's carrying about with him such a diabolical invention as, I see, you too have under your arm; and a good, soft papoosh would never have made such rents in her feradjeh as did his iron-tipped shoes, such as you are wearing. Now a clever Kadi could make such a case out of all this as would compel Rifat to marry Shuhreta on the spot."

Vejsil looked thoughtfully at him.

"But the widow?" he said.

"Oh," returned the hadji, with a hearty laugh, "she will be tamed to-day. Have you happened to hear, Kadi, that the Pasha has had a shoe thrown at his head?"

"A shoe!" exclaimed the Effendi, wonderingly, "No, I have heard nothing of it. But what of that?"

"Nothing of course. Shuhreta tells me that a shoe fell out of one of their windows yesterday on to the Pasha's head, as he went by; and both of them firmly believe that they will lose their heads for it."



The Effendi broke into a peal of laughter.

"That is good. So that's the way to tame the widow! Just the very thing."

"Bear in mind, moreover, that it was a Frankish shoe; for which, you are aware, Effendi, that did the Imam hear of it, a penalty of eight days fast would be imposed, and that the delinquents would have to pray five hundred fatihas."

Inspired by a sudden idea, little Vejsil here came to a dead stop, and, in his abstraction, caught his companion by the arm.

"Listen, komshija (neighbour), hark ye, hadji," hastily correcting himself, "if I were so to conduct matters that this very day, before the stroke of noon, the widow became your wife?"——

"Ah, then, we should not trouble about a hundred ducats, more or less; we should have them!" and the hadji proudly slapped his breast.

"I am well aware of that, you miserly rag-and-bones man," thought Vejsil, but did not put his thought into words.

"Will you leave the matter entirely in my hands, giving me unconditional powers to act?" he asked, after a pause.

The hadji hesitated.

"Otherwise I cannot undertake the case," resumed Vejsil coldly, observing his hesitation.

"But, Kadi," quoth the old man, persuasively, "we were but thinking it over. Do exactly as you think best ; only marry off the two young folk, and give me the widow."

"That is understood ! Call your ward across. We will go at once to the Konak, and set matters in train."

The little Effendi, with weighty official air, now calling up a zaptieh, directed him to give the Effendi, still waiting with such touching patience behind the woodstack, a summons to attend without delay at the Court of Justice ; giving him, at the same time, a number of secret instructions anent the widow of Ibrahim Kaimak.

Hadji Muhamed pondered for a brief space in indecision ; finally, faith in his Kismet conquered ; and fetching Shuhreta, he bade her follow him at a given distance.

With beating heart, Shuhreta accomplished the short distance to the Court of Justice. The vehemently gesticulating little Effendi, to whose discourse her uncle seemed ever to nod affirmatively, was to her an unfathomable mystery, over the solution of which she puzzled her brains in vain as she waddled behind them. And when, from time to time, she would steal a shy glance back, it was to see Rifat Effendi, keeping also at a respectful distance from her, and making

the most inexplicable grimaces in her direction. Once she stopped short, in order by some sign, to make herself known to him—but the incomprehensible fellow stopped short too, then making a wide circuit round her, with the longest strides of his long legs, hurried after his friend, whom he caught up just as they reached the Konak Gates. "Vejsil," panted he, shaking the other's arm, "I say, tell me—"

"Gently, gently, my friend," returned he, calmly, as together they ascended the steps. "Pray do not be so inquisitive; it is not becoming. You will soon be in possession of full information. Meanwhile, have the goodness to wait here in the outer hall, until you are called up. Hadji, I pray you, request the kadyn (lady) to wait here."

"Shuhreta," said Muhamed in a low voice to his niece, "if you take it upon yourself to speak to any one here, make up your mind to get a sound beating."

With this the two strangely chosen allies disappeared, leaving Shuhreta to reflect on her fast vanishing powers of self control. Since yesterday, everything had seemed bewitched, Rifat standing at the window was pointedly turning his back upon her, she could not go up to him, and pull his coat-tails before all the attendants.

Meanwhile, in the adjoining room, Vejsil had presented Hadji Muhamed to his judicial colleagues as an excessively wealthy, and, consequently, highly estimable man, thereby, at once, ensuring their favourable interest in his client—he also found a willing hearing for the case of Rifat Effendi from the worthy members of the bench, whose chief occupation seemed to be that of rolling and smoking cigarettes innumerable. And now Muhamed's action, on behalf of his ward, against the said Effendi, was committed to writing, with extraordinary celerity, as was also a power of attorney, authorising Vejsil to act unreservedly, and according to his discretion, in the case; by means of which, the hadji delivered himself over hand and foot, to his wily little legal friend. Vejsil literally chuckled with glee. The like of this had never fallen to his lot, even in his Constantinople experience. He found himself at once, plaintiff and defendant, with the right, moreover, to take his seat on the bench and adjudicate the case with his colleagues.

The hadji chuckled too.

"After all, Vejsil is a sharp fellow," thought he; "how he is going to bamboozle Rifat—but being in love with the one, and the other having the money, he will be equally content with either. If only he knew, that, although Shuhreta, the

younger, is in question, yet Vejsil is drawing up the contract so cleverly that he cannot lay claim to a para of her dowry, he would think twice about marrying her. It is I who am doing the best stroke of business."

Now Rifat and Shuhreta being led in, both remained standing in the centre of the room; Rifat moving a few paces on one side, as though afraid of his companion, stood glaring at her like an infuriated tom cat.

Little Vejsil assumed his most imposing judicial manner.

"Rifat Effendi," he began severely, "you are accused of having maltreated a Turkish lady in the public thoroughfare. You tore her feradjeh from top to bottom, and endeavoured to wrench the yashmak off her face. Am I right, gentlemen?" he asked, turning to his colleagues.

A murmur of assent was the reply.

Rifat felt utterly bewildered.

"Vejsil, my dear fellow, how can you say such a thing? Why you were there when I stumbled and fell."

"Accused, I am not here as your witness, but as your accuser, empowered by Hadji Muhamed, who, on behalf of Shuhreta Kaimak, brings this suit against you. Am I right, gentlemen?"

The smoking synod assented.

"Accused," he continued, with raised voice, "confronted, as you are, by this feradjeh, do not attempt to deny your shameful act, it will avail you nothing. Am I right, gentlemen?"

Muhamed Hadji never ceased wagging his head with delight at the turn things were taking; Rifat cast stolen glances at the baleful feradjeh from out whose countless rents shamefacedly peeped the orange-hued dimlija, and, as he did so, heartily consigned its wearer to the special protection of Malik (the Mohammedan Prince of Darkness); while Shuhreta felt, from moment to moment, that she could endure it no longer, and must slip out of the imprisonment of the feradjeh.

Receiving no dissentient murmur to his exordium, Vejsil, striving in vain to tutor his voice to the solemnity of suitable bass, continued,

"Accused, the circumstance that you are a student-at-law, renders the case against you infinitely more grave; and it becomes our duty, to award you a punishment doubly as severe as to any other similar offender. Am I right, gentlemen?"

Universal approbation. Rifat was still in doubt whether to laugh or be angry.

"You are proved guilty of wilfully damaging the property of another, and of public assault on

a woman," continued Vejsil, solemnly, "I therefore sentence you either to marry the complainant at once, or to pay her five hundred ducats damages."

Hadji Muhamed here appeared to be protesting against the first alternative; but his objection was silenced by Vejsil straightway producing his power of attorney.

The long Effendi was now unmistakably furious with his faithless friend. Five hundred ducats! That was beyond a joke. His parents' whole possessions did not amount to as much; and, even, if he could raise the money, was he to be obliged to throw it into the jaws of that miserly hadji? for his it would be in the end. No! rather to spite the fellow, he would marry the contentious widow—and twist her neck at the first opportunity. Such were Rifat's reflections.

The maiden's heart began to palpitate in anticipation. Drawing closer to Rifat, she whispered his name, but as the effect of the yashmak over the mouth is to make every Turkish woman croak like a raven, he, naturally, not recognising the voice, glared at her like a tiger.

"Accused," resumed Vejsil, "it is for you now to state which penalty you choose."

Rifat Effendi stamped for a while with both

feet, and thumped his umbrella upon the floor, then growled out from the depths :

"Well I don't care, I'll marry her!"

"Do I have your consent to this, Shuhreta Khanum Kaimak?" asked Vejsil, deferentially.

"Yes, yes," she croaked, as audibly as she could.

"And yours, Hadji Muhamed?"

"If it must be—Yes," he answered, and heaved a sigh, according to programme.

"Then affix your signature."

The newly-made benedict pressed his muhur (seal) upon the document presented to him, then, turning his back upon everyone, glared into a corner brooding revenge with the air of a school-boy who has been wrongfully caned.

The hadji, first carefully reading through the marriage certificate to assure himself that there was no word of dowry in it, deliberately appended his signature; after which, he would have fain jumped for joy; but that such a proceeding would not have beseemed his dignity.

And now the little Effendi, rising, majestically walked to the door of the outer hall. Opening it, he called in a loud voice:

"Hassan!"

The zaptieh, to whom he had previously given instructions in the Charshija, at once appeared.



"Bring her in," said the Effendi aloud ; then in a low voice : "Did you conduct it all with great mystery? Did you tell her that her step-daughter and Rifat Effendi were already in Court as witnesses? Is she very frightened?"

Receiving a laughing assent, Vejsil gave a satisfied nod, then leisurely returned to his seat. His judicial colleagues continued to smoke on, silently and peacefully, in patient expectation of coming events. Rifat, in his corner, seemed to have no intention of ever emerging from it again. Shuhreta, standing quite alone, looked about her wonderingly ; and Hadji Muhamed danced first on one foot then on the other, like a performing bear, or as if the floor were growing too hot for him.

The door, now opening, a veiled figure rushed in.

"For Allah's sake, my lords," she groaned. "Mercy! I could not help it.—I——" she could say no more, her teeth chattered with terror.

"We know all, kadya," said Vejsil. "There is no need to plead for mercy ; we exercise our office according to the dictates of justice and conscience."

"Oh, Effendi," moaned the widow. "Only this once, have mercy! I will do all that is required of me—only have mercy!"

The judges nodded silently. They took the widow for Rifat's mother, who was pleading for him, and considered her doing so, very natural. The hadji, on the other hand, was seized with sudden alarm.

"The devil!" thought he. "She has been listening outside, and wants to get Rifat let off, and make the marriage null and void."

Rifat, on his part, was weeping with emotion in his corner.

"Oh, the angel," he thought. "My sweet Shuhreta! Here she comes to plead for me, and I have married her step-mother!"

Wheeling a quarter turn, he again essayed to annihilate the girl with a look, but without success.

"You have no reason to fear anything, Hanum," returned Vejsil, with judicial calm. "But you must submit to the sentence pronounced upon you by this High Court of Law."

"Mashallah, indeed, yes. I am content with everything," and the Ibrahimza wept.

"Vejsil is a monster," said Rifat to himself. "I will strangle him for this, as soon as it is over."

"Good, then," exclaimed Vejsil, emphatically. "I hereby give judgment that two-thirds of the

property left by the late Ibrahim Kaimak, go to his daughter, Shuhreta ; and that, from this day, she enter into possession thereof."

And, now, with one accord, all parties began to protest. Rifat forsaking his pet corner, despite his love for Shuhreta, turned furiously upon Vejsil, shouting :

"What do you mean by that, you false crocodile, you liar ! First, you force me to marry the old woman, and then you take away all her money. What am I to do with her now ? I swear I'll flog her to death, that I will !"

Shuhreta, the younger, was screeching with delight at getting her money. Shuhreta, the elder, was groaning in utter despair.

"Oh, that good Rifat !" she sobbed, "he loves me after all ; he will not see me so impoverished. The hadji must have been compelled to witness against me. Oh, Mashallah, what heavy trouble has come upon me !"

Hadji Muhamed was protesting in the most serious and decided manner.

And still the little Effendi in no wise lost his self-complacency.

"You are a blockhead," he observed at last, in quite a friendly tone to Rifat, who took this observation so greatly to heart, that he at once returned to his corner to brood over adequate

vengeance for this fresh affront. Henceforth he neither saw nor heard aught of the proceedings.

"Gentlemen!" Vejsil now turned to his colleagues, who were looking on, in amazement, "have I not received from Hadji Muhamed, unreserved powers to conduct this case?—You bear witness to the authenticity of this document?"

"Yes, yes," shrieked the widow, before whose mental vision ever hovered the shoe that had fallen on the Pasha's head, and who now read her death warrant in the frown darkening the little Effendi's brow.

"Yes, yes, I am content."

"So you may well be," growled Rifat, whose love seemed all suddenly to have fled.

And now it began to dawn upon the Kadis that it was Ibrahim Kaimak's widow that they had before them, and not Rifat's mother; but they said nothing, each being loth to confess before his colleague that his judicial wisdom had been at fault.

"You hear, gentlemen, the kadyn expresses herself satisfied, as does also the hadji. The matter is therefore settled. Kadyn—"

"I will never consent," broke in the hadji, excitedly.

"That makes not the slightest difference," returned the Effendi, phlegmatically, "I am your representative here, and act as I think best. Kadya," he repeated, turning to the widow, "as Hadji Muhamed's proxy, I ask your hand in marriage. He is a rich man. The Pasha esteems him highly——"

The word "Pasha" electrified the Ibrahimza, who at once jumped to the conclusion that the hadji had interceded for her with the Pasha, and had obtained her pardon on condition that she married him. She thought of her diminished means—of her years—of the hadji's money bags—and promptly answered, "Yes."

The hadji, albeit with expression of equivocal satisfaction could do no less than accept his bride.

"Oh, the angel," thought Rifat, growing suddenly tender again. "Now she has to marry that miserable fellow, and I this she-dragon. But, revenge! I will run them through with my dagger, one and all."

"Gentlemen," resumed Vejsil, turning to the bench, "you witness that I now declare the marriage between Ibrahim Kaimak's daughter and Rifat Effendi; further, between Ibrahim Kaimak's widow and Hadji Muhamed Aga; to be valid and binding.' Then, resuming his

natural voice, with tragi-comic gesture, he exclaimed :

"Take my blessing, children; and mind that you invite all these gentlemen, and my humble self to your pir (wedding breakfast), and you," he added, in a low voice, going up to Rifat, "Do not forget my lordly share in this, and make good to me the hundred ducats promised me by the hadji, but which, under existing circumstances, he may very probably refuse to pay."

The long Effendi, wheeling round, looked somewhat foolish; darting to his wife, he gazed through the yashmak into her eyes, then straightway fell on Vejsil's neck.

"Holy prophet," groaned the latter, in his natural voice, as he pulled up his rumpled cravat, "despite all the trouble I have taken with you, Rifat, you are a barbarian still. No one in Constantinople would embrace a fellow in such murderous fashion. Was any such thing ever seen there?"

Shuhreta, the elder, meanwhile was looking speechlessly at them.

"Do you see, what a piece of work you have made?" snorted the hadji, and ground his teeth. "There was no need for all this botheration. You are as stupid as a sheep."

"Lucky for you that I am," was the affectionate rejoinder, "or I should never have married such a camel as you."

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The old feradjeh, heirloom dating from the time of the grandmother of Ibrahim Kaimak's widow, has become an object of pious reverence to Rifat Effendi, and has found an honoured place in the young Rifat Effendinanza's chest among her gala dresses. On the other hand, Hadji Muhamedinza has become the rabid enemy of everything Frankish. Not because her spouse desires that her windows should be screened by stout mushembaks, and her feet shod in yellow papooshes ; but because, on giving up to the young couple the house occupied by her as Ibrahim's widow, upon the wooden parapet running below the windows of her former bed-chamber had been discovered the unlucky Frankish shoe, hurled, on that memorable day, by her too skilled hand. In calm self effacement it had lain there ever since, never wotting that it had been accused of having threatened the honoured head of a Pasha.

**ABLA**





## ABLA.

THE balmy breezes of spring caressing the Posavina (plains of the Save) had been checked by the return of winter in all its severity, and now tender grass and budding primroses lay under a deep covering of snow. A leaden-hued sky spanned the vast plain, nothing broke the solitude, the infinite silence, save an occasional gust of wind which sent the heavy clouds scudding overhead, and whirled the falling snow about in all directions.

In the most forsaken corner of this immense, dreary waste was situated the Kumsale, the country seat of the Bosnian Bey, Sadik Beyitch.

Surrounded by roughly built lime huts, assigned to the serving men and dependents of the estate, by ruined, neglected-looking farm buildings and stables, stood the great one-storied mansion, falling to pieces with age. Every gust, as it shook the structure, crumbled away more and more of the discoloured plaster, exposing the worm-eaten beams and laths still more to the fury of the

wind ; the loose boards in the high roof rattled and groaned ; the jutting oriel windows creaked with every fresh blast. From the gloomy outer hall, that served as stable, a steep, rickety staircase, shut off at the top by a swing door, led to a great ante-room on the floor above ; through this were the women's apartments, to which the dark, low corridors and passages, with their smoke-begrimed wainscotting, lent a melancholy, cheerless aspect.

In the largest and best furnished of these rooms there reigned an unwonted stir and activity ; vast and gloomy, its stifling atmosphere was filled with cigarette smoke, to which a stove, and many charcoal braziers scattered about, contributed an intolerable heat.

Squatting on the divans were some twenty women of the Christian and Mohammedan peasant class, the latter arrayed in patched feradjehs and greasy yashmaks in honour of the young hodja, who, with face to the East, was chanting, in monotonous voice, Arabic prayers from the Koran.

Near to the stove, lay stretched upon a mattress, a female figure, worn and emaciated. She was clad in threadbare, gold-embroidered garments of garish hue, her face concealed by a veil.

It was the mistress of the house, wife of Sadik Bey, who thus lay dying.

A girl in shabby attire, covered almost completely by a red-striped veil, with head bowed down to her knees, and well-nigh as motionless as the dying woman, crouched beside the sufferer. It was Abla, her daughter.

And the women went on gossiping among themselves in their shrill voices; from below came up the sound of horses stamping, and swearing of grooms; from the passages the laughter and unchecked voices of the maids.

The hodja, now breaking off his prayer, drew writing materials from his girdle, and gently touched the girl on her shoulder.

"What is her name?" he asked.

The girl made no reply.

"Dil-Ashub," answered an old Turkish woman from her corner.

Hearing the voice, Sadik Beyoviza abruptly started up, tearing away the veil from off her head; the face thus revealed was repulsive, dark-skinned, withered, with projecting cheek-bones, thick lips, and flat nose.

"Who speaks my name after fourteen years of neglect? Who still remembers it? Yes, yes. Dil-Ashub, daughter of Sheikh Ebu Abdallah Muhamed Ben Said, Pasha of Bosnia."

Her voice failed, she sank back and closed her eyes. There she lay, daughter of the far-off South, painfully gasping for breath, her breast heaving convulsively with every blast that shook the house.

The hodja, inscribing certain Turkish characters upon a strip of parchment, enclosed it in a leathern bag, and would have hung it round the sick woman's neck, but she motioned him away.

"An amulet, hodja?" she gasped, in her foreign-sounding accents. "Give healing to my soul, not to my body, which is the prey of death, as are all things earthly."

"Were the world ordained to exist for ever, Allah's Prophet were then truly departed."\*

"Pray, hodja, pray," she whispered, "that I may again hear the speech of Arabia, my native land."

And the hodja, turning his face to the East, prayed on, and the women resumed their whispered chattering, their voices, by degrees, waxing louder and louder.

"What do you know about her?" said the eager voice of the Turkish woman, who had previously spoken. "I knew her full twenty years ago, when, still a young girl, she came

\* From the *Sure Hashar*.

with her father to Bosnia, and they lived in the Great Konak at Bosna-Serai. Then no one called her ugly. They named her Dil-Ashub, Wise Daughter of a Wise Father, and when, after the lapse of a year, she married handsome Sadik Bey, he reckoned himself a lucky man, for was she not the daughter of the rich, mighty Pasha? But when five years later, the mighty Pasha—whom Heaven bless—died, then Dil-Ashub was no longer the 'Wise' but the 'Ugly,' and Sadik Bey, with her money, bought the Kumsale, and sent her hither fourteen years ago. Abla was only a child then, but she refused to leave her beautiful home and handsome father, to go with her ugly, weeping mother. Shrieking she clung to her father's feet; he happened to have a whip in his hand, and gave her a cut across her ugly little face."

As though the woman's whispering had reached her ear, the girl crouching beside the dying woman, started so convulsively that the veil fell away from her face. It was that of a younger Dil-Ashub, only still more disfigured by marks of small-pox, while obliquely across her forehead ran a broad red scar.

A strange shudder passed over Dil-Ashub's countenance. She had paid no heed to the talk, yet had taken in its meaning; her eyes had

remained closed, yet had seen Ablā's look of agony.

The women continued their chatter.

"And Ablā is as learned as she is ugly. She can read the whole Koran, and knows Persian and Arabic. Yet she will be no better off than her mother, if she marries Suleiman Bey; he so handsome, and she so ugly."

The two women, whose misfortune was their ugliness, looked at each other with great sad eyes, and far better than any words did Dil-Ashub's eyes reveal to her daughter the tale of her love and sorrow.

"Might I but see him once again before I go forth to Eternity—he from whom it is so hard to part—" she breathed.

The wind whistled shrilly through the rifts, as it hurled dense masses of snow against the window panes.

Closing her eyes Dil-Ashub thought of her native palm trees; of the Hereafter and the joys of Paradise.

Gently the hodja laid the amulet upon the painfully labouring breast, and withdrew. As he opened the door, a bare-footed gipsy girl, some twelve years old, slipped into the room, and running up to Ablā, threw her brown arms round the Turkish girl's neck.

"Come away to serve the repast to the two guests. Oh, Abla, a messenger has come—ere Aksham (evening) Sadik Bey, the master, will be here," stammered the child, shivering with cold and excitement.

Dil-Ashub had heard the words. A bitter smile curved the corners of her mouth, as she lay motionless there.

After fourteen long years he came to see her die! Why had he not come to release her sooner, that he, the sooner might have been free and have inherited her wealth? True, he had taken no second wife to himself, although the Koran allowed it; but Bosnian Beys do not take a second woman to wife while the first is living, such things are only done among the poor who need their wives to work for them. No, he preferred to torture his wife to death, and thus leave himself free to make a fresh choice.

The gipsy girl drew Abla softly from the room. All the women streamed after her curious to learn what was going on. One only, a deaf old Christian, remained with the sufferer. Without in the semi-darkness of the passage, the crowd of women surrounded Abla, all talking at once.

"Had Sadik Bey come—or other guests?



Were the two strangers who arrived last night really envoys of the bridegroom?"

Abla drew her veil closer about her face.

"Ask the servants," she said at last, in her foreign, toneless voice, "I know nothing."

"Mashallah!" uttered the harsh voice of the old Turkish woman, "if there is really to be a wedding here, the like of it I have never seen in a Bey's house yet. Idris Bey's Hata wore her choicest dresses weeks before, and every seven days she sent a towar (mule-load) of fine gold embroidered linen to the family of her bridegroom; and the rarest viands and cakes were preparing in the kitchen. That is why I came half-a-day's journey hither. And you should have seen Omer Bey's Aischa——"

"Perhaps, after all, there may be no wedding," said Abla evasively.

"What?" shrieked the women eagerly. "For a fortnight past nothing has been talked of in the village but the handsome Suleiman who is coming to marry the wise Abla."

"Go, go," said Abla, and put some keys into the nearest woman's hands, "take all you want from the storeroom, and do as you like, but do not go back into my mother's room. Leave her in peace. I will call you when I want you."

The women remained for some time talking in the passage before they slowly went off.

But Abla heard them not. Turned away from them, her head resting against the lattice of the window, she was looking dreamily down into the snow-bedecked courtyard, where a tall young man in handsome uniform was pacing up and down in evident agitation.

Seizing Abla's listless hand, the gipsy child kissed it.

"Oh, Abla," she said timidly, "would you like to speak to him again—the handsome stranger down there?"

A quick, rich glow suffused the girl's swarthy disfigured features.

"Last night when his horse broke loose and you went down to fasten it up, because none of the servants were there, and he, suddenly coming in, asked you for Abla—you told him that you were Abla's drugariza (companion)."

"How do you know that, Pascho?" enquired the girl, turning away her face.

"Because to-day the handsome stranger has been asking all the maids for Abla's drugariza, and they, laughing, have replied that they never heard of her. And when, just now, I secretly plucked at his mantle, and told him I was Abla's Pascho, he gave me a ducat, and

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promised me another if I would pray Abla either to send her drugariza, or come to him herself—he had much to say to her.”

Abla was silent.

The child, climbing on to the window-sill, clung round Aba, looking into the great eyes that were uninterruptedly following every movement of the young man below.

“Abla,” said Pascho affectionately, with a wisdom beyond her years, “come down by the little back staircase; no one will see you there. Your mother is quiet now, and you will soon be back. The stranger—Bachrij Bey he calls himself—did entreat so; perhaps it would be for your happiness, he said. See, he is waiting there for me to fetch him. Oh, do come,” persisted the child. “It is already growing dusk. Soon Sadik Bey will be here, and I do so dread lest he should take you away. Oh, Aba!—away from your Pascho, and the handsome stranger,” she sobbed.

Aba pressed the little gipsy girl to her heart. Was she not her very own? Found, clothed, and brought up by her. Both had the same swarthy complexion, both were equally despised.

And Pascho, drawing her away from the window, threw a large veil over her mistress’s head, and led the half-willing, half-resisting girl

through passages and rooms, and down the narrow stairs into the open air.

"Wait here," said the gipsy child, "I will fetch him, and keep watch. When you hear me begin to sing, fly back up the stairs."

There stood Abla, her bare, brown feet in the snow, her heart beating wildly. Turning to the wall, she carefully concealed her face beneath her veil, that by her ugliness he might not know her to be Abla herself.

At that moment her sole trouble was caused by—vanity. She thought not of the misery that the next few hours might bring to her. The threatening doom of her merciless Kismet had no terrors for her; fevered by excitement, she was listening, heedless of the icy cold, for the stranger's approach.

"Bachrij, the God-given."

She had whispered it; yet the new-comer, his footsteps inaudible in the deep snow, had heard her.

"By those words I recognise the wise Abla's drugariza," said he, "for who but she can have taught you the meaning of my name?"

Trembling, Abla turned slowly towards the speaker.

"May Allah bless you, sir, for thus speaking of poor Abla."

"Why came not Ablā herself?" asked the young man, with somewhat unsteady voice. "It is no light thing that I have to confide in her."

"Since the return of winter to the land, Ablā's mother has lain dying, nor will she see the light of another day," returned the maiden sadly. "Ablā mourns. How utterly forsaken will she then be, for her beloved handsome father has long since been lost to her."

Involuntarily, as she spoke, her hand sought the scar on her brow.

"Then she, too, knows what parting is!" exclaimed the young Bey with emotion, and his soft brown eyes seemed seeking to penetrate the veil that concealed the girl's face.

"Yes," she proudly replied, "and she knows how to endure it. Does she not possess unalterable faith in Allah? Does not her mother bequeath to her the treasures of wisdom inherited by her from her unhappy father?"

Bachrij's eyes thoughtfully sought the ground.

"Lend me your ear, maiden, and then, if you love her, your eloquence with Ablā," he said gravely. "Time presses, it might indeed be already too late were Ablā not a second 'Ablā'\*

\* Ablā. The beautiful Bedouin maid, niece of Antar, whose beauty inspired that poet to indite the early portion of the Moulakat-Elegy.

for wisdom. Repeat to her what I now tell you: I and my companion, Ali Bey, are envoys of the family of our kinsman, Suleiman Bey, and his proxies\* to wed Abla, chosen to be his wife. For a considerable time past Sadik Bey has been seeking a husband for his daughter, in order to free himself of her in fitting manner, it being known that the mother cannot live much longer. But no suitor was to be found for her, Sadik Bey being niggardly in the matter of dowry, and the poor maiden, herself, having a reputation for unusual ugliness. Now the mother of Suleiman Bey is the once so lovely Leila, at one time renowned throughout all Bosnia for her beauty—sung by poets. The same Leila whom Sadik once loved so passionately, and whom he was forced to give up for sake of the Pasha's daughter. And Sadik Bey has heard that Leila is still beautiful, and, since she has been a widow, has squandered all her money. He is now sending her bags full of ducats, and mule-loads of the rarest, costliest stuffs, for which, when he is free, and Suleiman has taken Abla to wife, Leila will have to marry him."

The young man's voice began to tremble.

\* Among the Mohammedan families of position marriage by proxy is customary.

Abla stood unmoved.

"Oh, maiden!" he continued, "and Suleiman loves Zubeida, a maid lovelier than the houris of Paradise, the daughter of a man poor and of low estate. As children they grew up together, he played with her, and now, the long night through, he stands beneath her window and kisses the walls that enclose her. He loves her more than the light of his eyes! Suleiman's uncle and guardian, Hassan Bey, his father's brother, is a widower, and he, too, wants to marry Zubeida, and has contrived to turn all her family against Suleiman, even her father. Zubeida has been taken away he knows not whither. The Imam (high priest), whom they have bribed, even threatens him with penalties if he dares to marry a blood relation—she is a distant relation on the mother's side. Leila raved and vowed that she would not give her consent to the marriage until Abla was dead, and Zubeida was rich—then, sinking at her son's feet, she wept and implored him to save her, until, in despair, he yielded. And now Suleiman will either go mad or torture Abla to death, as Sadik has tortured Dil-Ashub. This is what you must tell Abla—do you hear, maiden?"

Taking a step nearer to her, the young man, for an instant, laid his hand on Abla's shoulder.

She, shuddering, looked up. She had been listening to the sonorous tones of his voice, rather than to the sense of his words, and now she was terrified to see the passionate emotion depicted on his face.

"Maiden, speak. Leave me not without answer. The moments fly so swiftly, and the decisive hour is so close at hand," he urged.

A slight flush suffused his handsome face.

"I am not only his nearest of kin, but I believe myself to be his best friend. His misery is mine, hence he has sent me, trusting that even now I may find a way out of this."

"And what would you have Abla do?" she asked thoughtfully.

"How do I know?" he returned excitedly, stamping his foot and breathing heavily. "Time—at least win time. See, with growing dusk, Sadik Bey will soon be here, and I then am bound, as Suleiman's representative, to speak the decisive word. As arranged, two days ago, we met Sadik Bey at B. I and my companion, who is devoted to me, made a wager with Sadik that we would be the first to reach the Kumsale despite his superior horses. He took the wager. We thereupon made him drunk, bribed his servants to do their utmost to delay him, and



ourselves galloped the whole way through storm and snow. And here I have gained one whole day upon him to no purpose."

"Not so," returned Ablā with decision. "You have done enough. Ablā, too, will do all she can—she will refuse to marry Suleiman."

"Will she? Oh, then Suleiman is saved. We are his proxies—we shall carry out his duty and woo Ablā, and if she refuse our suit, we shall retire. Thus, at least, time will be gained," he said with flashing eyes, "and if Suleiman have but time, he will seek Zubeida in every corner of Bosnia until he find her, and then death alone shall part them. But," he added hesitatingly, "can Ablā carry this out?"

Ablā sunk her head. She had not weighed the full extent of her promise.

"Sir, you have called Ablā 'the Wise,'" she said at length. "She will find a way."

But she lied. She saw no way. She only felt within her that power to act, born of misery, when there is nothing more to lose. It was in her hands to grant Bachrij's desire to render his friend happy, why then refuse—even must her worthless life be made forfeit?

Mutely the two stood side by side.

"Maiden," said the young Mūslem, "Suleiman himself shall thank Ablā. But have you any

wish in my power to fulfil, as you have fulfilled this of mine?"

"Yes, Bachrij Bey," and her face flushed beneath her veil, as she spoke his name, "I, too, am called Abla. Say to me, for my reward, 'Abla, I thank you.'"

The young man had drawn closer to her, his eyes were moist. With lightning flash the truth had been revealed to him.

"Abla," he said, deeply moved, "from this hour look upon me as your, and your name-sake's, brother. Should you no longer have a home here, come to me. The little that I possess shall be shared with my beloved and with you—my sister."

As he spoke, Abla was slowly reascending the stairs, holding back her breath that she might not break into sobs. At the top, turning, she paused and looked down upon Bachrij. Through an opening in her veil, despite the gloaming, he could clearly distinguish the great dark eyes in which tears were shining.

And now, borne across the plain, came the sound of shouting and the neighing of horses.

"Allah Emanet" (the blessing of Allah be upon you), said Abla sorrowfully.

"Sadik Bey is at hand," he exclaimed, and hastened away. He turned as he went to nod

and smile, then disappeared round the side of the house.

Abla, descending the stairs, kissed the ground on which he had stood, then flew back again.

"Ah me, the burning pain and smart  
That love doth bring to tender heart,"

sang Pascho, as running up, she carefully removed every trace of footmarks from the staircase.

Unobserved, Abla reached her mother's room. Dil-Ashub lay with closed eyes, her breath coming in laboured, fitful gasps. The deaf old Christian woman, crouching by the stove, was staring with imbecile expression into the glowing embers. Abla cowered down beside her mother and looked with terror into her changed face. Only the slight rattling in the dying woman's throat and the crackling of the fire broke the stillness.

The confused sound of many voices came up from below. At times Abla could distinctly hear above the others the stern authoritative tones of a voice she had not heard for fourteen years, and yet had not forgotten.

Thus an hour passed.

Suddenly Pascho slipped noiselessly into the room, trembling in every limb; crouching down beside Abla, she whispered:

"Have you seen 'the master' yet? I have been downstairs and have heard. In the great room next to the stables many Svati (wedding guests) are sitting smoking. The men-servants are making coffee, the maids up here preparing sweet dishes for them. In the smaller room the master, the two strangers, the Kadi (magistrate) from the neighbouring village, and the hodja sit, talking and writing. I distinctly heard the master say that two villages and many thousand ducats would be made over to Sulciman in perpetuity, as soon as Abla became his wife. Then, calling Muji, he ordered him to tell Abla's women that she was to come down at once, and Muji sent me up with the message. Oh, Abla, they want to take you away. Muji is already putting the rugs into a sledge," the child sobbed out in a low voice.

Abla stroked her hair.

"Go back, Pascho, and say that I will not come."

The child went away. After a time she returned with scared face.

"Oh, Abla, the master is swearing such fearful oaths. He says you are to come this very instant."

"Say that I will not," said Abla calmly.

Reluctantly Pascho went towards the door.

"I dare not go downstairs again," she said timidly, "the master will beat me."

Once more all was silent.

Suddenly, in a low but clear voice, the dying woman said :

"Say a *fatiha*\* for me."

Abla, rising, turned towards the East. She would have prayed, but her head was in a whirl. Her thoughts were with Bachrij, and instead of praying holy words from the Koran, she commenced reciting Al-Bussiri's "*Burda*."†

". . . . None was there to compare with him, as in his sublime majesty, He stood as though surrounded by an host. His person, by all as the Divine Image adored, yet bearing impress of man, transcendent in beauty, delicious as a flower, noble as the moon at its full, mag-nanimous as the sea, swift in action——"

The door was abruptly flung open. A tall, handsome man, noisily entering, paused for a moment, dazzled by the contrast from the light without to the darkness within. Gradually he distinguished Abla's tall, erect figure.

"Are you Abla Khanum?" he asked harshly.

Even as he spoke a flame shot up in the

\* The first *Sure* of the Koran, The Mohammedan Lord's Prayer.

† Celebrated song of the "*Burda*," the mantle of the Prophet.

stove, and he could see the red scar across the girl's face.

Though receiving no reply, he did not repeat his question.

"I am Sadik Bey, your father," he continued. "For two hours past I have been under this cursed roof, and no one has come to do me homage. What is the meaning of this?"

Abla's throat seemed to have contracted. With trembling hand she pointed to the dying woman, who appeared past seeing or hearing.

He could not distinguish her in the uncertain light, but he divined who it was lying there with rattling breath.

"What is she to me?" he cried. "An Arabian beggar woman, not worthy my great clemency. It is on your account, loathsome wench, that I have journeyed so far. With extremest sacrifice have I found you a husband, whose lowest maid you are unworthy to be. And now do you refuse to come when I command your presence?"

Abla, falling down before him, clung to his feet as once before.

"Oh, my lord, let them kill me—turn away your countenance from me evermore, but grant her one kind look before she goes home to Allah."

"To hell may she go!" he roared, and struck

out with the heel of his heavy Frankish boot at Abla's face.

Uttering a hollow cry she staggered back.

The old Christian, growing frightened, stirred the fire until it burst into a blaze, illuminating the whole apartment with vivid light.

At Abla's cry of distress, the dying woman started up on her couch, her eyes roamed round without power of recognition, and in frenzied delirium she began declaiming in shrill voice:

"And as the Lake of Sava vanished into earth, pining in vain for water, the parched ones turned them back. It was as though dread fire had quenched the water floods—as though, vanquished by water, fire itself had sunk. The howl of Jinns resounded, lightning lit the skies. Yet e'en that warning startled not the erring ones. Had not stern voice of prophets truly told to them: A crooked faith is one that ne'er can be made straight? Had not they seen the stars from highest heaven fall—dashed down to earth, as from the—altar—idols?"\*

Dil-Ashub sank back.

The old Christian, as she secretly made the

\* From the "Burda." The passage refers to the night of the prophet's birth, when Nushirvan's palace was rent in the middle; the altar fires were extinguished; the Lake of Sava was dried up, etc.

sign of the cross, gently laid the dead woman back upon the pillows, and closed the wide, staring eyes.

Sadik had turned livid with horror.

Abla lay prone upon her face. Approaching her, he gently touched her shoulder.

"Abla, my daughter," he said with trembling voice, "let us pray together for the soul of your mother."

And kneeling side by side, they prayed silently. When they rose from their knees, the Bey glanced at his daughter. There was a deep open wound under her left eye, from which the blood was streaming. He turned from the sight with disgust, but quickly mastered the feeling of repulsion. Now he must act.

"My daughter," he said, "your mother is dead. It shall be my care now to provide for you better than I have hitherto done. Therefore, I pray you, obey me!"

Abla looked up at her father. The horror, the disgust depicted on his countenance she took for emotion, his cunning for compassion.

How handsome was her beloved father—how kind. He entreated, he did not command. Ah, truly Allah had enlightened him, and she drew her veil closer over her face that he might not reproach himself for what he had done.



He, meanwhile, was thinking.

"Can the Bey's daughter be wedded and nuptial guests be entertained when the bride's mother, the mistress of the house, lies dead? No; such a thing were against all usage. Yet Abla must marry, that Leila, in two weeks' time, may be my wife!"

• Aloud, he said :

"My dear daughter! We have joyous guests within our walls, who leave us to-morrow. Did they learn the death of the mistress of the house, their joy would be turned to sorrow. Let us therefore keep it secret. We will carry the body across to the little empty room, and you can tell her women that it was your mother's wish to sleep there, in order that they might have this room in which to make merry."

Abla kissed his hand. She could not speak; it all seemed like a dream to her.

The Bey gazed cautiously out at the door to make sure that the corridor was empty; then, with help of his daughter, shudderingly carried the dead woman across to the little room, where the wind was drifting in the snow through the broken window-panes. The old Christian woman, following with a brazier, cowered down beside it in a corner.

Sadik, grasping his daughter's hand, drew her

hastily from the room, as though he were pursued by evil spirits.

"Go—fetch yourself a fresh veil. I will await you here," his voice faltered, although the words were said in tone of command.

Abla, staggering into her own room, exchanged the blood-stained veil for a fresh one. As she turned to leave the room, Pascho, with beaming face, ran in and stopped her.

"Sweet sister," she cried, "know you who Bachrij Bey, the handsome stranger, is? He is Suleiman Bey himself—he whom you are to marry. The real Bachrij Bey has stayed behind on the way. The stranger's servant has drunk much raki, and has told it. But rejoice, then. Do you not like him?" asked the child anxiously, seeing Abla stand immovable, as though struck by lightning. "And, oh, what is the matter with your face?" cried Pascho, horror-stricken. "Who has struck you?"

Abla made no reply. Feeling her way along the wall, she rejoined her father, who, seizing her by the hand, led the resistless girl down the narrow, rickety staircase, Pascho timidly following. Arrived at the bottom, the Bey said:

"Cover yourself completely, Abla, the law does not allow your face to be seen," and opening the door of the room, he pushed her in.

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"Here is Abla, my daughter," he announced, and took his seat upon the divan.

Abla remained standing where he had left her. As in a dream she saw the two strangers, her father, the hodja, and the Kadi, the latter pen and parchment in hand.

Then, the two strangers rising, Ali Bey said solemnly :

"In the name of the widow of Muhamed Bey Nuhitch and of his family, we, Ali Bey and Bachrij Bey Nuhitch, ask whether you, Abla, daughter of Sadik Bey Beyitch, with consent of your parents, will become the wife of our kinsman, Suleiman Bey Beyitch?"

But Abla neither saw nor heard him ; she only saw the handsome face of Bachrij Bey, upon which was portrayed the most poignant anguish of mind, while his cousin was speaking. No longer Bachrij, it was Suleiman—Suleiman who was trembling for Zubeida's fate! And what did Zubeida possess more than did she, save her perishable beauty? Oh, might Abla but die by his hand, then it would be hers to gaze upon his dear face until her eyes should close for ever!

"Say 'I will,'" exclaimed Sadik Bey authoritatively.

A death-like silence prevailed.

"I will!" cried Abla, in a shrill voice.

Suleiman turned crimson, then grew deadly white.

A faintness came over her; she clutched at the air as though seeking support, and with the movement the veil fell back from her face. She was conscious of the look of repulsion with which Suleiman turned from her; she heard the hideous oath he muttered, then fell senseless to the ground.

The Kadi and the hodja, unmoved, proceeded to put the customary question, for a girl's consent must be demanded three several times.

Sadik Bey answered in Abla's stead.

The Kadi pressed his muhur (seal) upon the parchment, thereby attesting the validity of the marriage, and passed it to the other witnesses.

Suleiman, the tears coursing down his cheeks, sat with averted face, muttering curses; his companion's eyes were fixed sympathetically upon him.

The women-servants, summoned in haste, with loud cries dragged Abla to the upper chamber, where they proceeded to deluge her with water.

"Ah!" screamed the loquacious old Turkish woman, "she has fainted for joy. Look ye, let a rich Bey's daughter be as ugly as the devil himself, she still gets a handsome young husband.

And the hole she has made in her face does not add to her beauty! Uff! Her eye is all swollen—that no hekym (doctor) can cure for her.”

And they bathed and bandaged the poor girl's face. Pascho sat in a corner and howled. At length Abla awoke from her swoon.

“Health and happiness to you and your husband, Sulemain Beyoviza!” cried the women tumultuously. “Allah grant you long life and happiness!”

Abla rose from her reclining position. Her over-wrought brain had somewhat recovered its balance. Was she really Suleiman Beyoviza, as the women had hailed her?

“I thank you one and all,” she replied. “Here are all the keys,” taking a bunch of keys from her pocket, “choose out from mine and my mother's wardrobe what clothing you like—Pascho will show you what there is—and divide it among you. More, I have not to offer you. Prepare what food you wish for yourselves. You can remain in this apartment; I will go across to my mother.”

“Where is Sadik Beyoviza?” was the amazed enquiry, the women now in their excitement for the first time perceiving that the mattress by the stove was untenanted.

"She is sleeping over there in that little room. I will watch by her with old Stana. Meanwhile, enjoy yourselves."

"Oh, beloved Suleiman Beyoviza, how great is your goodness," and the women pressed round to kiss her hand. "How sad for us that even to-morrow you must leave us! His servant has told us that Suleiman Bey, your lord, and his family are providing you a *pir*\* such as has not been known before in Bosnia."

Leaving the women to chatter on, Abla went across to the dark cheerless little room opposite. The brazier, by which the old attendant crouched in prayer, emitted a feeble glow. Abla, kneeling beside her, gazed across at the rigid countenance of the dead, and sank into deep thought.

She had broken her word! Yet a promise given to Bachrij was not, necessarily, to be kept to Suleiman. How he must now abhor and despise her. Now even her "brother" was lost to her; he would torture her into her grave, and then—marry Zubeida! Love, grief, and jealousy raged in her heart. Despair overwhelmed her. Springing up, as though to escape her own thoughts, she hurried out of the room.

\* Wedding feast, which may be held after the actual wedding.

Loud singing and laughter from the servants' quarters struck upon her ears. And why not? Had not the daughter of the house been wedded that day? Going to the latticed window, Abba looked out into the dark night. The wind had sunk; now and then an occasional snowflake fell.

"Leaving the mountains behind, if one goes two hours' distance across the plain, one reaches the Save." She shuddered. "Allah has forbidden suicide," her thoughts went on. "Yet if he permit me to throw myself into the Save, is not that his will? Can a straw bend before the wind unless he will it to do so? Kismet! Man is but a plaything in the hand of Fate. And Suleiman would then look on Abba, the Ugly, no more; made rich and happy by my dowry, perhaps he might even bless and pray for me. As it is they curse me, he and—Zubeida."

She groped her way along the passage in the dark; as she went she stumbled up against something, it was a coffee stool at which the women had been sitting. An idea struck her. "Were I to carry this stool, and place it on the bench under the window of the long room, where Suleiman is certain to be now," she thought, "I might see him once more."

And seizing the sofra, she glided noiselessly with it down the back staircase. Peering cautiously about her, she stole along by the side of the walls, through the deep snow, to the bench, where, on summer nights, the men-servants sat singing the pathetic melodies she had loved to hear.

Clearing away the snow, she placed the sofra upon the bench, and stood upon it. The window was not as high as she had fancied, she could overlook the entire room with ease, filled as it was, with clouds of smoke.

The Svatis and youths of the neighbourhood were sitting upon the high divans in the order prescribed by their rank or age; at the upper end of the room, beside the master of the house, sat Suleiman, his eyes meditatively following the smoke of his cigarette, while between his delicately arched brows there rested an ominous frown.

Abla, pressing her glowing face to the iron bars of the window, gazed intently upon him.

"Oh, that Fate would grant me but to be his humblest maid. Might I but see his dear face irradiated with happiness! But never more will his eyes look kindly upon me—how unhappy is he now made through me!"

Her eyes seemed to attract him with magnetic



force. Suddenly his face was close to hers, and he was looking at her affectionately through the window.

"Abla, dear Abla!" he said.

She trembled with delight. He spoke so low that the other inmates of the room did not hear, but she lost not a word.

"I am not unhappy," he said. "Is not lack of beauty in you far out-weighed by the wisdom for which you are celebrated throughout the land? Impart, even to me, those priceless treasures of knowledge; speak to me, Sun of your house."

"I cannot," she replied. "Did not my mother die in delirium with the verses of Bussiri upon her lips, in punishment to me for having profanely recited from them instead of praying fatihas for her?"

"No," he said, "she praised the Prophet. Continue you to do so Abla, wife!"

And she, lowering her eyes, could raise them no more.

"Beloved, in my dreams thine image came to me, and love's arousing turned sorrow into joy. Strong as that of the men of Usra is my love. Therefore forgive, nor scorn that love as thou art just; my heart thou hast divined, although it fain would hide that which my tears, alas, to

you betray too well. You gave me counsel, yet, perverse, I would not heed. Unto reproof the ear of love is ever deaf——”

“Ah, be silent, Abla, do you not see, my love for you? You will be the pride, the ornament of my family. Let Hassan take Zubeida to wife——”

And a happy smile played over Abla's face—the snow fell thicker and thicker—the blood ceased to trickle from her cheek. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

“Abla!” resounded the sharp, clear, terrified voice of a child in the grey of morning.

Pascho, wading through the thick snow, looked anxiously around. Upon the sofra cowered Abla, with rigid limbs, her glazed eyes fixed upon the thickly frozen window panes, behind which the lights had long been extinguished.

Swift as a young cat, the child sprang upon the object of her search, to fall back with the lifeless body of her mistress into the deep snow beneath. The gipsy girl's piercing screams rent the air. Men-servants came running up from all sides.

“Help, help!” she shrieked. “I have been seeking her everywhere since I woke. And now I find her here—dead—dead!” And, throwing

herself upon the body, the child kissed it passionately.

"Who is dead?" asked Suleiman, drawing near; but fell back in horror, as he saw Ablâ's hideous, contorted face. "Bring round our horses, quick, day is breaking," he exclaimed in a low voice to his man, who had followed him, and, himself, hurried away in search of his companion.

"Throw her into one grave with the old woman," said Sadik Bey, recognising his daughter in the dead girl. "The hodja is still here, he can read the burial service over the two of them."

Pascho howled and lamented.

"Be off, you little beast!" cried the Bey angrily. "Go to the devil with your Ablâ," and he struck at her with his whip. "Be off with you! And do not let me see you here again!"

Pascho fled in terror. Suddenly she saw the two mounted strangers, and their man.

"Oh, take me with you, sir, take Ablâ's faithful Pascho with you," she cried, running up to the side of Suleiman's horse. "Allah will reward you."

Suleiman's eyes were moist; he lifted the child before him on his saddle.

"Come," he said. "She died for me. You are a legacy from her."

"Whither are you going?" shouted Sadik Bey to the two horsemen.

"Away," returned Suleiman, "there is nothing more for us to do here."

"Give me back my gold, the assignments of my villages. The marriage is invalid," roared Sadik Bey, beside himself with fury.

"No," said Suleiman, as, with his companion, he slowly rode away. "The gold I will give to Leila that she may not need to marry you, and the assignments," he felt in his breast, "are Zubeida's marriage dowry."

"A gun, bring me a gun!" roared the Bey. "Saddle me a horse, you dogs, quick!"

They brought him a one-barrelled gun. Trembling with fury, he aimed, and fired.

With laughing face, Suleiman looked back, as he waved a written document in his up-lifted hand. Then, setting spurs to their horses, swift as arrows, he and his companions sped away.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Kumsale has long been in ruins. No one, from that time, would live in it. On moonlight nights Dil-Ashub and her daughter, Abla, the Ugly, may be heard weeping and lamenting

amid the ruins—so say the country folk—and should the traveller's road lead him that way, he makes a wide circuit round the desolate abode, as he prays a fatiha for the souls of the two unhappy women.

# YUSSUF'S ASHYKLIK



## YUSSUF'S ASHYKLIK.

"If thou would'st know why trees surround,  
This gloomy and sepulchral ground—  
It is because each cypress tree,  
Slender and graceful, mindeth me,  
Of that sweet form whose almond eyes  
Spoke kisses—that the grave denies."

*Turkish Poem*

"OH, Meira!"

It may have been a long time that Yussuf had stood gazing through a chink in the crazy wooden fence which separated his house from the neighbouring courtyard, wherein the beautiful Meira was leisurely sauntering, a snowy shower of blossom from the flowering shrubs falling upon her dark hair as she walked. Her gown of blue silk, heavily embroidered with gold, swept the grass, the dainty fez she wore was coquettishly tilted to one side, and like any European belle in a ball-room did she gracefully toy with the flowers, as though, instead of being surrounded by worm-eaten



planks and dingy lime huts, she were the centre of a crowd of admirers.

For it was Friday, the day of wooing, of Ashyklik, and behind wooden fences and lime-washed walls there too were men to admire and sigh.

Hark—what said the evening wind!

“Oh, Meira, sun of my eyes!”

Her face assumed a bored expression.

“It is that stupid Yussuf again,” she thought, but all the same she made her way among the bushes nearer to the fence, having first given a cautious glance around to see if anyone were looking.

“What are you making such a noise about?” proceeded from her rosy mouth, in somewhat harsh tones.

The pair of blue eyes gazing so yearningly at her through the chink, sank dismayed.

“Do not scold, Meira,” said Yussuf shyly. “You do not know how long I have been standing here—to-day—yesterday—every day since last Friday. Why is it that you so suddenly hide yourself away from me? Am I like a stranger, only to be allowed to come on Fridays to Ashyklik?”

“Do you suppose,” she interrupted him haughtily, “that because I am poor and an

orphan, I am always going about unveiled like any beggar girl? My mother was a Bey's daughter!" And Meira proudly threw back her pretty head, and looked scornfully about her, as though she were an enchanted princess.

"Yes, yes, you are right," he returned still more shyly. "But do remember that you are my sweetheart, and that we are just about to be married."

"Married? You are ever so much too young, Yussuf, scarce eighteen. I believe I am the elder of the two! You have seen nothing; know nothing," she said affectedly.

Yussuf's effeminate mouth quivered, as if with suppressed tears. Her words perplexed him. He had vexed Meira, and now, of course, she only wanted to punish him for it by alarming—tormenting him.

He had grown up in the belief that they were suited to each other—existed only for one another. She was an orphan like himself; she, since her childhood, had lived on that side the fence, in the tumble-down lime hut, with her old aunt. He, on this side, with his old manservant who had brought him up. For him, there was nothing in the wide world but his Meira, and the little squalid village in which they lived.

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"Ali Bey is younger than I am, and yet he is going to marry," he said at length.

"Whom?" asked Meira hastily.

"I have heard the beautiful Iffeta mentioned."

The girl grew crimson.

"Iffeta of Skopljak?" she said excitedly.

"Do you know the story? Two brothers met one Friday beneath her window. The one said to her, 'Sing.' The other said, 'No, do not sing, speak to me.' The girl kept silence, encouraging neither; and this so angered the two, that they drew their khandjars on the spot, threw themselves upon each other, and fought on until both were killed. And since then every one throughout the land talks of the 'beautiful' Iffeta, and now she is to marry a Bey, and to live in the town. It is too bad! And I am sure she is not more beautiful than I am," she added, as if in thought.

"No, indeed not. You are the most beautiful of all," said Yussuf reassuringly, not in the remotest degree following her train of thought.

"But you would not kill anyone for my sake," returned Meira irritably. "Not even Asim Aga, who is safe enough from your blood vengeance," she added in derision.

Yussuf looked at her with astonishment.

"Now, Meira," said he, with incredulous

smile, "you cannot be in earnest! And why Asim Aga, of all men? Because his father killed my mother's brother, am I to kill him? How can he help that? He is a fine fellow. My step-brother's property and mine adjoin his, and I could not wish a better neighbour."

Meira laughed scornfully.

"Oh, Yussuf, you are a hero! Then it is all in vain that your good step-mother is hoping that big Asim may slay you one day, in order that your property may come back to her Mehmed?"

"Don't you believe all that my Ibro chatters," said Yussuf quickly. "I am sure that my step-mother does not grudge me my father's heritage."

"Indeed? And why then, immediately upon your father's death, did she send you, a little boy, to this lonely village? Only that you might pine away, or that, if according to vendetta, you should slay Asim, they could hang you."

"Now, don't you believe it," asseverated Yussuf; "such bad people do not exist. From a child I loved this village, and when my father used to take me with him into the town I would grow ill with longing for the green woods; that is why my step-mother sent me here. And, besides,

why should Mehmed envy me? After all, he is richer than I, his father left him more than mine did me; nor can he desire Asim Aga's death, for he is his friend."

"They only wish to stir you up by Mehmed entering upon a friendship with your enemy, for the richer a man is the more he wants," Mcira informed the lad, whose optimism was as ludicrous to her way of thinking, as was the expression of his astonished child-like eyes. "Is Mehmed Effendi really so rich?" came involuntarily from her lips.

"His possessions are more than Asim Aga's and mine together," returned Yussuf. "When I met him and Asim Aga in the market place yesterday——"

Now Mcira eagerly turned full round towards the speaker; hitherto she had stood with her back to him.

"Ah!" cried Yussuf, for the first time perceiving a large amber heart that she was wearing among other trinkets round her neck, "where did you get that from?"

"I found it in an old chest—it belonged to my mother," she stammered, turning from him again in angry confusion.

"It is exactly like one I saw in the bazaar yesterday, and was so vexed that Asim snapped

it up at double the price when he saw that I wanted it. And there were bracelets too, just what you would like, and those also Mehmed managed to buy. The shopkeepers really seem to think his ducats better than mine, just because he wears a professor's white turban," said innocent Yussuf, not perceiving in his vexation that Meira was pushing something hastily up under her sleeves.

"So you have brought me nothing!" exclaimed the fair one with a frown.

"Oh yes, I have, my Meira. You told me that there should have been a zouave to the blue costume I brought you lately," and, very humbly, he pushed his tyrant a thin package through the chink.

She received it with condescension, examining the lovely, gold-embroidered bodice with critical eyes; Yussuf, the while, anxiously studying her expression. Finally she nodded approvingly. It would become her admirably, thought she. Would Asim but come soon, or, better still, Mehmed, before he rode back to the town! She was certainly more beautiful than the "beautiful" Iffeta, and Asim, after all, was but a simple Aga, while Mehmed was rich and an Effendi.

"I will keep the zouave," she said at length.  
"It is very pretty."

And she put it on, surreptitiously unfastening the amber heart as she did so, and thrusting it into her pocket.

The youth's face literally beamed with joy.

"I am so glad you like it! Oh! for our wedding I will buy you far handsomer things. Mehmed, too, seemed to have taken a fancy to this zouave, but if I had had to pay ten times its price, it should not have fallen into his hands."

The Turkish girl's face blushed scarlet.

"What?" she cried. "Mehmed was there, when you bought it? You buy women's garments before other men, for them to go and gossip over it, and for people to talk evil of me? There, you may keep your rubbish!" And tearing off the costly bodice she trampled it under foot.

Yussuf's eyes slowly filled with tears.

"But, Meira," he said, startled at her violence, "who knows of it? Who saw me buy it? Your betrothed may surely make presents to you?"

But even his pleading looks were unnoticed by her as she angrily stamped her foot. Had Mehmed seen her in that zouave all would have been over. That booby, Yussuf! The beautiful Meira looked positively repulsive in her rage.

"Go!" she stormed, "do not let me see you again. You are a bad man, you do not love me. Go as far away as ever you can, if you do not want to make me still more furious."

It had suddenly struck her that Mehmed might be coming soon.

And Yussuf, sad and crestfallen, stole away. Undecided whither to wend his steps in order to obey Meira's behest, he mechanically passed down the street in which their two houses stood, until he came to the rushing mountain stream. Here he could go no further; should he turn back? If his old Mujo were to see him wandering about the muddy streets in his new opanken (shoes) and Friday chakchire (trousers) he would be sure to scold. So he sat himself down on the fragrant grassy bank among the bushes to deliberate, while half unconsciously hot tears streamed down his thin, girlish-looking face.

The beauty of a spring evening exerted the more powerful influence over him in that he was so little conscious of it; the strong scent of flowering trees intoxicated him. His grief seemed to him at once so overwhelming and yet so trivial. What more did he ask for than summer—summer wherein to dream through the spring and winter of his life with Meira? . . .



The youth, resting his head upon his knees,  
sank into dreamland . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

A shot resounded near.

Yussuf started up wonderingly, and rubbed his eyes. Darkness was around him; he must have slept for hours. Ere he had come to any clear idea of things, someone passing stumbled against him. Yussuf involuntarily caught at the stumbler's garments.

"Ho, ho, who is this?" he cried.

"Is it you, boy?" responded a man's voice, in suppressed tones. "Don't make such a noise, it is I, your brother Mehmed. What are you doing here?"

The speaker seemed somewhat agitated.

"Come, look sharp, let us get out of this," he added. "I believe over there," pointing in the direction of Mcira's house, "some one has been shot, and if we were to be caught here, we should get into trouble."

Startled, Yussuf turned to go away. In Turkey every one takes to flight in any night accident. Cries for help are answered by the shutting up of doors and windows, for the first person on whom the zaptiehs can lay hands, is accounted guilty.

So it was in Bosnia, also, under Turkish rule.

As the two brothers noiselessly slipped away towards Yussuf's house, the latter spied some shining object in the road by Meira's garden fence. He picked it up. It was Meira's amber heart. She must have given it to some child to play with, and it had been dropped, he thought. Else how should it be lying there? Stealthily pressing it to his lips, he hid it, Mehmed feigning to see nothing.

When they entered Yussuf's simple living room, where the old man-servant, cowering over the mangal (charcoal brazier) was anxiously awaiting his young master's return, Mehmed exclaimed scoffingly :

"I, too, happen to have a certain right to Meira's heart. Will you not share it with me?"

"What?" asked Yussuf, not trusting his ears.

"Why, the heart you hid away but now. Or do you mean to give it back to her?"

"To whom?" asked Yussuf again, not knowing what to say.

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't try to make yourself out a greater fool than you are, boy. If such a trinket is found lying before pretty Meira's door, who, but she is likely to have lost it?"

It was not there this afternoon, she was wearing it then." . . . And throwing himself upon the divan, he laughed aloud.

"Oh, what evil calumniating people there must be in the world," thought Yussuf, and seated himself in silence in a corner.

"I have been away from home, you must know, since yesterday, looking over my fields," explained Mehmed. "By the way, Mohammed himself could not desire a better host. You neither enquire whence I come, nor whither I am going. Just bring in a light, old Ibro, that I may better see this pattern of all the faithful," and he laughed until he shook again.

Yussuf scarcely heard him. He was searching in the recesses of a chest for a gold chain on which to hang the amber heart.

"What are you rummaging for in there, youngster?" began the Effendi anew, when the old man, grumbling to himself, had gone out of the room. "You are surely not looking for conserve of roses to regale me with," he continued jeeringly. "Rather go after your protector, and ask him if the zaptiehs are gone yet. I want to be off too."

Scarce had Yussuf left the room, ere Mehmed, springing up from his reclining position, had drawn some object from his belt, and hastily

concealed it in the bottom of the chest, among the articles of clothing.

"All is going capitally," he muttered, "I could almost feel it in my heart to be sorry for Asim, and even for that stupid youngster Yussuf. But chance having shown itself so propitious, it were a sin not to take advantage of it. A few thousand ducats are not to be despised."

And thrusting his hands into his pockets, and whistling a tune, Mehmed sauntered out into the courtyard. There he found the two. Ibro, with angry gesticulations, talking in a subdued voice to Yussuf, who, with downcast head, stood thoughtfully listening.

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed Mehmed, going up to them with a laugh. "What important business may you two be engaged upon, that you can leave so honoured a guest as I am to sit by himself in the dark? Do you want to be quit of me? I am quite ready to go. But is all quiet without? Yes? All right. But where shall I find my horse? I do not know my way very well about here. On hearing the shot fired, I dismounted hastily, and Selim may have bolted. It is only to be hoped, in my search, that I bring no coffee pots down on my new fez."

"I will go with you, Effendi," muttered the old man.

"And why not?" observed Mehmed, to whom Ibro's sharp eyes were not altogether welcome. "But you surely cannot leave your lambkin alone? He may be afraid to be left in the dark."

Mehmed's words did not fail of their effect. The blood rushed to Yussuf's head.

"There is no reason for you to amuse yourself at my expense," he said, in a tone of childish defiance. "Were you not my guest, I would soon show you that I am no coward. Let us go."

Mehmed prudently refrained from irritating him further. All he had wanted was that Yussuf should go with him; that he should be the one to be arrested by the zaptiehs.

It was somewhat strange that Mehmed seemed to know the exact spot where to find his horse. He did not lose much time in seeking him.

"I might have reached the town by now," he whisperingly remarked to Yussuf, who walked silently beside him, as they noiselessly made their way along. "I was on my way there this evening, but my horse had hardly gone a few paces before he cast a shoe. The smith was not to be found at first, so night had fallen ere I could proceed. Scarce had I made the short distance between Asim Aga's, whose guest

I had been, and here, when the affair occurred that led me to your house. I am curious to learn who was shot. It may be one of the fair Meira's many swains who lies there bleeding—slain by the hand of a jealous rival!"

Yussuf saw not the mocking face with which Mehmed illustrated the pathetic close of his speech, but the words themselves jarred upon him, and, for the first time in his life, made him feel something akin to hatred. Mehmed's piercing eyes gave him a sensation of horror; his well-nigh audacious mood seemed strained and unnatural.

"Give my house a wide berth next time," said Yussuf.

The Effendi uttered a low laugh.

"Then I shall have to visit you elsewhere, wherever you may chance to be, my boy! Ah, here is my horse. Very sensible of him not to have strayed far."

Yussuf stopping short, angrily turned his back upon his brother. Mehmed laughed still more, for, by so doing, it had escaped Yussuf that the horse was tethered to the tree by which it was standing. Not even a white lie was necessary, so well everything was going, and next day the foolish boy might prattle as he pleased.

"Many thanks, youngster, for your hospitality!" Mehmed called back, as he cantered away.

And Yussuf, standing in the silent, muddy village street, wept with vexation. Ibro was right. He should not have admitted Mehmed into his peaceful home in the dead of night—the man whose evil eye must surely bring him harm. And harm that evil glance had already wrought in Yussuf's heart, chasing away its peace.

He still wept, when, in the privacy of his own room, he had hung Mcira's amber heart as an amulet round his neck; and he wept so long that he himself would have found it difficult to tell the reason of his weeping. For the second time that day he fell asleep, his eyes wet with tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

What a stir and talk there was in the village! The women could not give themselves time to muffle decorously in yashmak and feradjeh, as, merely throwing a veil over their heads, they drew on their yellow boots, and hastened across to the neighbours' houses, where, uncombed and unwashed, they crouched by tens and twenties in the stuffy little rooms, drinking bad coffee, and eagerly discussing the astounding event of the past night.

In the midst of one of these coffee-drinking

conclaves sat Meira, the belle of the village, arrayed in Yussuf's blue silk gown and costly zouave, which latter had been carefully picked up from the ground by her on Yussuf's departure. So she sat, looking haughtily about her, like any sultana, scarcely deigning to open her mouth when asked a question.

And, in truth, there was material enough for gossip. For years the village had known nothing to equal it.

Yussuf, that miscreant, whom may Allah burn! had murdered the noble, handsome Asim Aga last night, before the very door of Meira's house. And it had clearly not been to avenge the blood shed by Asim's father, but from mere jealousy. Oh, Mashallah!

But, praise be to Allah, the zaptiehs know everything. Already, at sunrise, they were on the spot; had dragged Yussuf out of his bed, the wretch pretending to be fast asleep, had put him in chains, and had marched him off to the town gaol. He would fain have lied, the scoundrel, and was wearing round his neck the very amber heart that poor Asim, but yesterday, had bought in the bazaar; while, at the bottom of his clothes-chest, hidden among his things, they had found a recently-discharged pistol, the lock and mouth black with smoke.



All this the women knew accurately.

"I heard Yussuf's door shut soon after the report of the pistol. Did not you, Meira?" said one of the women.

Meira smiled.

It was a smile that rather affirmed than denied. Meira did not desire to be summoned as a witness, therefore she said nothing, merely smiled.

"Had there been any little quarrel between Yussuf and you yesterday, Meira, that can have excited him against Asim?"

"No," drawled Meira, and again she smiled.

"Oh, that monster, that cowardly Yussuf, to have so treacherously murdered handsome Asim, instead of openly fighting him. What a husband Asim would have made for you, beautiful Meira! He certainly meant to marry you, or he would not have come so often to you for Ashyklik; of course, he meant to present you with the amber heart. Why did you not go out to them? Perhaps the misfortune might have been averted had you done so. Uff! Mashallah!"

And Meira smiled. She knew wherefore, although her companions had no idea why they were suddenly lauding her and Asim Aga, so greatly the while they condemned Yussuf. Nor

did they perceive, in their eagerness, that they had forgotten to close the windows so that their voluble tongues could be heard in the street below, where be-turbaned fathers of families sat together in their shops over coffee and chibouques, discussing the same theme in somewhat calmer fashion. These worthy men, too, shook their heads disapprovingly over Yussuf, as they confided to each other how, to their minds, the youth had long been on the road to the Prophet's nethermost pit; knowing well the while why they spoke thus. Had not Asim Aga powerful kinsmen, and would not the influential Mehmed Effendi be pleased when he heard how his friend had been lamented?

Then how audaciously Yussuf had laughed, how defiant had been his mien, when the zaptiehs had marched him out of the village, the good-for-nothing! they said.

Oh, Yussuf, of the child-like heart, the world is not as thou seest it with thy great, wondering eyes!

Of course he had smiled, as, scarce able to bear the weight of his chains, he had walked through the village street, greeting his friends as he went; he would be back among them to-morrow, perhaps even that very day, as soon as he had explained the mistake to the judges.

N

It did not strike him how people turned away from him; that those with whom he had grown up from a child did not look at him. It never occurred to him that they could consider him guilty; he only thought that they were grieved to see him in chains.

But the further he went the more serious he grew. The greater the heat of the sun, the more oppressive he felt the weight of his chains. The inquisitive looks directed at him in the villages they passed through pained him; the jeering words the children shouted after him wounded him. He pondered how he would complain to the Pasha of the rough treatment to which he had been subjected when set free again, and, of course, he would be free by to-morrow at least. It would be so easy to clear himself of the charge of having shot Asim, even were his mere assurance not believed. True, the pistol perplexed him; how came it in his chest? But that Ibro would explain; the zaptiehs had not allowed time to ask the old man. And then there would be Mehmed's testimony.

Ah, Mehmed! A shadow seemed to fall over Yussuf's spirit—that man with the evil eye—he alone it was who had brought him misfortune! But, perhaps, he would not need Mehmed's

testimony. He would tell the judges that he had loved, not hated, Asim—that he could not have lifted his hand against a fellow creature.

But they did not question him. He was not taken to the Court of Justice, but to a gloomy little cell in the fortress.

When the key had gratingly turned in the heavy lock, and Yussuf was alone, a great oppression seemed to fall upon his brain.

Days came and went ; he did not count them. Then, one day, the sound of a well-known voice struck upon his ear. The voice, rough and harsh, was singing an old national air, and its tones awakened in Yussuf's mind recollections of the rushing mountain stream that flowed through the unfrequented village street, wherein stood his home and—Meira's.

Starting up, he looked through the little barred window of his cell. His faithful Ibro stood on the ramparts without, and poignant emotion passed over the old man's weather-beaten features as he recognised the pale, thin face of his young master behind the prison-bars.

"Yussuf," he called, in a hushed voice, "Allah will help us. On the death of your father I privily hid away all the ready money we had to lay up for you against evil times. While

Mehmed Effendi has been away again in his fields, I have used my opportunity to dig up the five thousand ducats, and have handed them over to your judges——”

What more he would have said was stopped by the guard, who, marching up, hustled him away.

Yussuf had understood but little of what Ibro had said. All the time his old servant was speaking he had a sound in his ears of the rushing mountain stream at home, and his lips were whispering “Meira ! Meira !”

A little later some zaptiehs, coming into his cell, unloosed his chains and led him out of the fortress, through several lanes, to a handsome imposing-looking building, and Yussuf, at last, was before his judges. There he stood mute, motionless, staring vacantly about him.

Upon the cushioned divans sat many Effendis, clad in black Frankish dress, engaged in eager conversation. He who sat in the chief magistrate's seat, addressed Yussuf :

“Prisoner, you are now free to go wherever you list ; but beware of committing any further misdemeanour. Another time you will not be so leniently dealt with.”

In truth, another time old Ibro would not be able to bring them five thousand ducats sterling

so expeditiously—of that the most learned Effendis were well aware.

But Yussuf, falling down before the man who had given him back his freedom, kissed the hem of his garment. A hazy remembrance came to him of how he had meant to defend himself, and to complain of the harsh usage he had undergone; but the words he had meant to speak did not come to his mind.

"Here is your letter of discharge," continued the Effendi authoritatively, and handed him a sealed document of well-known peculiar shape.

Yussuf, receiving it, turned to go. At the door he looked back, involuntarily clasping his throat.

"The heart," he stammered, "the amber heart. They have taken it from me; and yet I must give it back to her. It belongs to her—to Meira."

The Effendis were in good humour, and Yussuf's manner amused them, so an attendant was told to search for the amber heart and give it back to him.

Snatching eagerly at it—his amulet—Yussuf thrust it into his tunic. He could have wept for joy, but had no more tears. He would have thanked his judges, but his voice refused to utter a sound.

Mute and with unsteady steps he passed out into the street. A scent of flowers pervaded the mild, balmy air, just as in his native village. Lads were sauntering about in their holiday attire, laughing and talking, or had taken up a position beneath latticed windows and before closed doors, with pleading gesture, undeterred by the sounds of the suppressed giggling of their fair ones within.

Yussuf stood still and pondered. "What was to-day?" and he began counting back to that one, when he, too, in his holiday best, was standing at the chink in his fence, through which he could gaze at his Meira in all her beauty, of course! Friday had come round again, the day of Ashyklik.

Was Meira still angry with him, or was she waiting for him? A thought flashed through his brain. Every Friday he had wooed her, why not this one too?

From an adjacent minaret the muezzin called the fourth hour of prayer. People, streaming towards the mosques, pushed the brooding Yussuf hither and thither, and laughed to see how unconsciously he bore their thrusts. If he ran all the way he was thinking he might still reach home before nightfall; and, of a sudden, he set off running, people shaking their heads

as they gazed after him, the street-boys running after him amid shouts and jeers. Yussuf, not looking back, continued to run, until his youthful, panting escort, finally losing patience, indignantly flung their greasy fezes at his head, to pick them up again out of the dust, shake them, and put them on with a sense of having been misled, then with more measured pace to take their homeward way.

Yussuf tore on and on, the road growing less frequented as he proceeded. He had left his shoes in the outer hall of the Court of Justice, and his bare feet were bleeding from the sharp stones, but he heeded not the pain. His eyes were roving far ahead; there, where green woods hemmed the horizon, lay his village—there lived Meira.

“Meira!” he exultantly shouted, and ran ever faster.

But with sunset, Yussuf's strength gave way. Utterly exhausted, he sank down by the roadside, his feet so swollen he scarce could drag himself a step further. Despairingly he gazed into the distance; it must take full three hours ere he could reach the village, and by then it would be midnight. Still, what matter? He would steal up softly to his sweetheart's house, and, gently tapping at her lattice, would whisper :



"Oh, Meira!" She should be the first to see him. Would she rejoice? This question Yussuf asked himself a thousand times: To his faithful Ibro he gave not a single thought.

Rising, at length, he went wearily on his way, making as great haste as his failing strength would allow.

Suddenly, at some distance, he descried a horseman before him, riding upon what seemed to be a noble Arab steed, and leading a second horse by the bridle. The rider was crossing the fields at right angles to him. Once the horseman turned in the saddle, and Yussuf fancied he saw a pair of weird, repellent eyes fixed upon him. At so great a distance this was clearly a delusion, for, enveloped as the rider was by the clouds of dust raised by his horses' hoofs, his figure, even, was scarce distinguishable; yet Yussuf instinctively experienced the mixture of dread and hatred that had become habitual to him when even thinking of Mehmed, a feeling for which he could in no wise account. Now there rushed into his mind the conviction that he was once more vaguely nearing some hidden thing, important for him to know, but which he was either unable to grasp, or that had passed out of his mind.

The horseman, too, with head bent on his

breast, pondered as to who the solitary wayfarer could be. A frown of discontent was brooding over his dark countenance, his bushy eyebrows seemed to grow more and more lowering the nearer he approached the village, which was also Yussuf's goal.

Ere the horseman reached the village street he alighted, fastened the fore-feet of each horse together, and let them go loose in the meadow. Then closely wrapping himself in his cloak, slowly strode along the deserted street to Meira's house, where halting, he knocked softly at her lattice.

All was still. Nervously the man looked about him. The houses were built only on one side of the road; the one before which he stood projected a little beyond the others, thus he was shielded from inquisitive eyes.

Night was nearly over; the willow trees opposite were casting mysterious shadows on the moonlit road.

"Mehmed Effendi?" lisped a girl's voice from behind the stout wooden bars of the window.

"Yes, yes," replied the man roughly. "Why did you make me wait so long? It is no great pleasure to be standing here all night."

"Why then did you wait so long last Friday

under the shadow of the willows?" giggled the voice.

"Stuff and nonsense," retorted the man, firing up; "what do you know about that?"

"Of course you must know more than I do."

"Silence, Meira!" exclaimed Mehmed angrily.

"But, Effendi," returned the girl scoffingly, "what has brought you here then so quickly in reply to my message that I wished to speak to you concerning last Friday night? Save for that message, you would not have come here so soon again, although you never used to miss appearing at Ashyklik."

"You have enough in attendance without me," was the harsh rejoinder.

"Oh, no, Effendi, who came but you, or Yussuf—or Asim? If you were not intending to come any more yourself, you might have left the others in peace."

"Say what you want of me. I have no time to waste listening to your twaddle," gasped Mehmed excitedly.

'What I want of you? Well, I want you to make over to me, unconditionally and for ever, Yussuf's portion that has fallen to you, seeing that you have had him falsely accused—and, moreover, seeing that it is you who shot Asim,

who would have married me—that you marry me yourself,” said Meira composedly.

“Ha ha!” exclaimed Mehmed, forcing a laugh. “And what will you do if I refuse?”

“Oh,” returned the girl calmly, “I will tell everyone how I lost the amber heart given me by Asim Aga on Friday morning, when talking to you at my door that evening at sunset; and will also tell them of which merchant you bought the pistol, a month ago, that was found in Yussuf’s chest. Do you not recollect even telling me the man’s name?”

“And that is all you know?” said Mehmed, vainly endeavouring to resume his former sarcastic tone.

“Not quite all,” returned Meira, “I chance to know of a man in this village who passed the spot where your horse was tethered for hours while you were on the track of your friend Asim, who had shown you hospitality, and whom you shot dead as he was in the act of knocking at my window. I saw the whole thing distinctly. You were standing there, under that tree——”

Mehmed did not look in the direction to which she pointed. He was staring at the lattice behind which Meira was standing, as though he would pierce it with his eyes.

"And if my sole testimony is not believed, that of others will be who saw you ride through the village at sunset, and who noticed how the sound of your horse's hoofs suddenly ceased at the far end, as though you had dismounted. It is not altogether wise in you, Effendi, to suppose that we poor village folk should not be greatly interested in all that so mighty an Effendi as you may condescend to do," she said mockingly. "Why, if they were questioned, those living at the other end of the village could testify to having heard the faint sound of a horse's hoofs an hour after the shot was fired, and none of our people are in the habit of riding out at night."

"Who would dare to accuse me?" proceeded hastily from Mehmed's lips.

"I only need to do so, and you would no longer be the powerful Mehmed Effendi. One accuser draws a hundred in his train; nay, people would even go beyond the truth in their zeal, for you are not greatly beloved about here. Yussuf's fate to-day would be yours to-morrow, did people but see your star beginning to decline."

Mehmed knew that Meira was right. But to give himself so entirely into her power! He had committed this crime in order to amass

more wealth, that he might one day marry the Pasha's daughter, and, perhaps, eventually become Pasha himself.

"I will give you a thousand ducats, Meira," he said at length, "if you will keep silence. Yussuf's barren fields are certainly not worth more. I do not fear your threats," he added, "but I wish to settle our differences amicably."

"Oh, Effendi," exclaimed Meira sarcastically, "you are too good. But were I to acquaint Asim's kinsfolk with what I know, they would give me as much out of sheer gratitude; and with my thousand ducats I could free Yussuf, and share his fortune by marrying him."

"Why not do it then?" retorted Mehmed, feigning indifference.

"Because I do not want merely to wear as fine dresses as a pashiniza (wife of a pasha), but to sit with her on the same divan and live in a grand house in the town," returned the girl boldly.

The Effendi was silent. Avaricious himself, he felt he was being driven by this still more avaricious girl into a corner, and knew not how to extricate himself. True, Meira was beautiful; but what would his relations—what would his mother say to such a match? Yet, on the other hand, what else remained to him?

"You must come to a decision, Effendi," said Meira, her sharp eyes fixed somewhat uneasily on the trees opposite. "I leave you a perfectly free choice. I make no entreaties to you. If you want me, I will go with you at once; there would be nothing unusual in my doing so, it is the custom of our village, and would ensure your not deceiving me. You have brought two horses, as I sent you word in my message? If you do not want me, then—— Oh!——"

Here Meira uttered a startled cry. For some minutes past, she had seemed to see some object moving under the shadow of the trees opposite. Suddenly the figure of a man emerged from out the blackness, crossing the road in the direction of Meira's house. Midway the figure stopped, as though rooted to the spot, gazing fixedly at Mehmed, who, with back turned towards the new-comer, was looking intently at Meira's lattice.

"It is Mehmed! He is making away with her—stealing her."

In an instant Mehmed felt himself in the clutch of some infuriated creature, a pair of frenzied hands grasping his throat.

It was a short voiceless struggle. At first it seemed as if the muscular Mehmed must succumb to the suddenness of the attack; but he had

soon succeeded in freeing his hands, when, thrusting his fiercely-clinging adversary from him, he drew out a dagger from his belt and plunged it home.

There was a grating sound, followed by the thud of a human body.

“Oh, Meira!”

In the intense stillness the sound wafted up like a death-sigh.

With hurried, trembling hand Meira lifted the lattice from its socket and stepped out of her window.

As from a ghost, Mehmed started back from the girl, enveloped in her black feradjeh.

“It is Yussuf,” she said, without a trace of emotion in her voice. “He was coming to me to Ashyklik!”

The great strong man before her trembled as though stricken with ague.

“Let us away—quick!” he stammered. “I—I will take care of you.”

The girl, stooping, picked up a folded white paper from the ground. The darkness prevented her from at once recognising what it was. She passed her hand scrutinisingly over it, and felt that it was a long document, folded over at one end, thus forming a cover to the written portion. Her fingers also detected the large official seal



affixed, and a ray of intelligence flashed through her mind. What could it be but a letter of release?

"Of course you will take care of me," she exclaimed in her cold-blooded way, as she held the document close up to his face. "Look at this! It is somewhat further from here to Mecca than from Yussuf's letter of release to—your condemnation."

Mehmed made no immediate reply.

"I did not want to do it—I did not want to do it," he muttered at last.

"It is just as well now that it is done," said Meira indifferently. "People will say that Asim's kinsmen have had their *vendetta*. Yussuf was a stupid lad, who knew nothing of the world;" and, hurriedly fastening the window lattice back into its frame, Meira seized Mehmed's arm and drew him away.

Not one glance did she vouchsafe to the youth who lay stretched on the grass beneath her window, the cherished amber trinket, token of his betrayal, resting, bathed in blood upon his heart. There was a smile upon the still, ingenuous face, and over the lips, silenced for ever, there still seemed to hover the words, "Oh, Meira!"

# BORN OUT OF TIME

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## BORN OUT OF TIME.

"MUJO, do not forsake me. If you have any faith in a higher power, Mujo, do not forsake me?"

She had thrown herself at his feet, and was clinging to his garments ; a little emaciated woman with sunken eyes, and voice sounding so shrill and hollow.

The angry veins stood out on the brow of the good-looking young Turk. He made a movement as though to free himself, then desisted ; standing so his eyes wandered impatiently round the little smoke-begrimed kitchen, then out through the open door, away over the slope, up which clustered Serajevo's sea of houses.

A thick white covering of snow lay upon the surrounding mountains, and over the town, where the windows of the houses, ever and anon, sparkled like giant diamonds in the rays of the clear winter sun.

An icy wind swept through the gloomy little kitchen, the woman gave a convulsive shudder,

and the young man rubbing his hands in his agitation, made a step towards the door.

"Have done with this, Atija," he said roughly. "You are thrice 'cast off,' and that, according to law, is irrevocable, you know it well enough; so make an end of this, and let me go."

She groaned aloud.

"Oh, Mujo, light of my eyes—Oh, Allah, have mercy on thy creature," she sobbed, "I cannot bear it. . . . Do you remember, Mujo, the day you came to me from the Arnautic land,\* so ill and destitute, with sweet stuff to sell? Lonely, and poor as I was, I took you in and nursed and tended you, and you swore then never to forsake me. . . . Oh, Mujo, perhaps I have been too miserly, too saving—take all I have, house, garden, sheep—all shall be yours, only do not leave me."

He gave a short, hard laugh.

"I can have all that without you, my good Atija Khanum; a better house, more kmeten (servants), and, moreover, a handsomer—"

She gazed fixedly at him, as he broke off. The hectic spots on her cheeks gave way to a deathly pallor.

"Ah, then, it is for that—for that," she said brokenly; and letting go of his garments, she

\* Albania.

staggered to her feet, clutching at the wall with trembling hands.

The path to the door was free now, yet he still hesitated. Half good-humouredly, half derisively, he looked into her worn face.

"You see, Atija, you were born out of time," he said, then with deliberate, yet withal, precipitate step, he left the house.

There was a sound of snow grinding under foot, of a garden gate swinging back with jarring clang into its hinges; then the footsteps died away down the steep, narrow, winding path, and were lost amid the merry voices of the school children, who, released from mekteb (school) were gaily jolting down the mountain side in their little sledges. Atija still stood where he had left her, with head sunk on her narrow chest, and eyes gazing out into vacancy. The cold roused her; shivering, she opened a door leading into the adjacent room, and sitting on the rug beside the extinguished stove, drew out a little hand mirror bought of some wandering pedlar, a possession that had once been her pride. How often she had gazed into it with smiling face, to see the reflection of herself adorned with amber beads, or golden ducats, or fez ornamented with some dainty bouquet—and now. Now the mirror gave her

back nought but a view of eyes sad and weary, a hollow face, and pathetic mouth lined with care.

"Born out of time! Yes, yes, much too soon for him, the young, handsome Mujo," said the mirror mockingly; and the treacherous glass fell with a crash from her hands and broke.

"Too old!" she murmured. And unfastening the rows of amber beads and ducats from her throat, she took off her fez, and wrapped her head in a dark-hued shawl, such as is worn by widows.

Silence and gloom pervaded the room, the thick lattice work that filled in the windows allowed no daylight to enter. With something akin to terror she looked about her, then rose to her feet.

Two young girls, with red striped kerchiefs on their heads, were passing one of the windows, chatting and laughing, as they strolled along; she thought of the handsomer woman Mujo was meaning to take to wife—and the poor deserted woman sank to the floor utterly strengthless, the picture her mirror had shown her reverting to her mind.

"Oh, were he but my son," she groaned, "then he still might love me. Oh, were he but my son!"

She longed to weep, but the fount of her tears was dried up.

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By degrees the neighbours came flocking in to console the cast-off wife. And now from morn to eve the gloomy parlour was filled to overflowing, some of the women, whose husbands chanced to be away, staying all night. The house was turned upside down, the contents of the store-room exhausted, some of the neighbours, who had brought their maids with them, kept them incessantly employed making coffee, while they themselves crowded together cowering on the floor, smoking cigarettes, their black feradjehs thrown back, their veils artistically draped upon their shoulders, untiringly commiserating the mistress of the house, and loading her with good advice.

"You should go to my neighbour, the hodja, Atija Khanum, he would need but to pass his hand a few times over his forehead, pray a few words, and Mujo would not know another happy moment."

"No, no, the hodja of Hamid-Bâba Mosque is a much greater magician, you should go to him, Atija Khanum, if you would be freed from your sorrow. He can so rule events that



Mujo would be brought back to you within three days."

"So 'can I," here put in Kanite Khanum, a middle-aged woman with swarthy skin, and great coal-black eyes.

"But of what use would that be to poor Atija? She is thrice cast-off, and that is irrevocable before the law of Allah and man. Were it not so, I could easily bind her a bunch of herbs which, if thrown in the face of Mujo's bride when on her way from her parents' home to Mujo's house, would work wonders. Mujo would never more leave Atija's side; her dying eyes would rest on him, and if he might no longer cherish her as a wife, he would reverence her as a mother."

Atija had remained motionless, cowering in a corner of the room, but at these last words of the swarthy Turkish woman, she raised her head, and gazed fixedly at the speaker, her thin face quivering. And Kanite Khanum spoke on, and Atija Khanum drew ever closer and closer to her. The others had long ceased to listen, and had begun talking and laughing among themselves on all manner of cheerful topics; and as it drew late, and Kanite Khanum began to prepare for departure, she whispered to Atija:

"You are going, then?"

Startled, she who was thus addressed looked down, an unsteady light flickered in her eyes; then she firmly answered:

"Yes, I am going."

And she really did go forth to seek after her vanished happiness.

The snow lay as high and soft, the sun shone as brightly as on the day she had lost him; and on this very day he was to take home another in her stead. Well nigh cheerfully she looked at the great house, which appeared to shut in the end of the lane that she was slowly, expectantly, pacing.

"If they would but come! I seem to have been waiting here a year," she murmured. "I wonder if the milada (young wife) is beautiful; if I shall be able easily to single her out from among the crowd of women?"

Thoughtfully she paced to and fro on the narrow, snow-trodden path; there were no passers-by to be surprised at her strange behaviour. The way was bordered on either side by garden hedges, with here and there the back of a house looking on to the lane. At first she felt the cold, and walked faster and faster to keep herself warm; her breath came

with difficulty, now and then she suppressed a cough.

"What can be keeping them—what can be keeping them?" she whispered.

Suddenly a hot flush passed over her face; alarmed and agitated, she stood still with trembling feet. How hot her yashmak made her! Lifting the heavy feradjeh, she stretched out her hands as though to assure herself of the continued cold. How curiously warm it was! Might not one think it summer; the scent of flowers and the song of birds were in the air. Wonderful! Yet all around lay rigid in snow and ice. . . . With eyes sparkling, and light elastic tread she walked on.

"If they would but come. Oh, I shall never be able to wait for them."

Suddenly signs of movement were apparent in the house at the end of the lane. The gate was thrown wide open, and from it issued an open peasant's cart, in which a number of veiled women were sitting.

Terror seized Atija as she saw the vehicle approaching. How could she spring upon it and reach Mujo's young wife.

Mujo's wife! Was she indeed there among those women?

The hot blood rushed more and more violently

to her head, a great dread seized her lest she should fail, and thus miss her remaining chance of happiness.

The cart came nearer. She screamed to the driver to stop, but her voice failed, and the feeble sound she made was lost in the rumble of the wheels.

Frenzy took possession of her.

"Mujo!" she shrieked. "Oh, All-Merciful, give him back to me! Let me not die in grief and despair;" and, rushing towards the vehicle to stop it, she clung with both hands to it, endeavouring to swing herself upon the step; and had almost accomplished her aim, incoherently stammering out the words of the Arabic charm as she feverishly clung to the side of the cart with one hand, with the other she flung a bunch of fresh herbs full into the face of a languishing-looking young woman who, sitting in their midst, seemed to be the object of interest to the others.

The next instant Atija was lying in the road.

The driver who had in vain endeavoured to rein in his horses, now, in alarm, pulled them to one side.

"Drive on, drive on," shrieked the women.  
"Curses on the witch."

And a few seconds later they had disappeared round the corner of the lane.

Atija remained motionless where she had fallen. Had she been struck by the horses' hoofs, or had she stumbled, and the cart wheels gone over her—who shall say?

A second vehicle, filled with young men, now drove rapidly up; in it were Mujo and his guests. At sight of the black veiled figure lying prone in the snow, a dread foreboding seized the bridegroom, the figure seemed to be so familiar to him.

Hastily he jumped down, the others trying in vain to hinder him, and approaching the fallen woman with reluctant steps, yet impelled by some irresistible impulse from within, he bent over her.

Slowly Atija opened her eyes, a ray of ineffable happiness irradiated them; her breath came slowly and fitfully. He raised her head.

"Mujo," she whispered with a smile, "Mujo!"

As she said his name a stream of blood stained her veil. Terrified, he let her sink back into the snow.

His djever (best man) who had hurried after him, now tried to draw him away.

"Let the strange woman be," he said. "The affair might get us into trouble, you know."

The vehicle rattled on, ere it had turned the corner, the rejected wife raised herself with superhuman effort, and her last look rested indeed upon Mujo ; but upon Mujo on the way to his young wife. Ah, why had her faithful eyes not closed one second sooner, when she lay resting in his arms? Why must she be doomed to die, as she had lived, out of Time?



MAHMUD BĀBA





## MAHMUD BABA.

IF there was ever a man of contented mind, that man was the hoary-headed Mahmud Bâba; he did not know the meaning of discontent, and had never even heard of unhappiness.

Once when the misery of the many had been discussed before him, Mahmud, reclining in his favourite seat amid the branches of a noble lime tree, remained long pondering over what he had heard without being able to realise its meaning. Human misery? What was it? His peaceful eyes roamed meditatively over the green slopes stretching away on every side, the while he stroked his long silvery beard.

Ever since he could remember, he, silent old Mahmud Bâba, had sat every summer evening in the branches of the lime tree, where an airy retreat large enough for four or five people had been constructed, with hanging ladder attached, which even now Mahmud Bâba could climb with ease. The lime tree stood in a corner of the highway, cut off from the main thoroughfare

by a clear, murmuring, mountain stream; on the other side of the stream, so close to the road as to be over-shadowed by the spreading branches of the tree, was Mahmud Bâba's khan, a hospitable shelter for wayfarers. Early and late was the old *caféji* employed stirring brown coffee powder into boiling water for weary guests; while they, forming themselves into a semi-circle in the flickering fire-light, sat silently listening to the grey-headed bard Guslar who, year after year, delighted his hearers with his improvised lays.

"Mahmud is there—evening has come again," the bard said, as he glanced through the open window of the khan towards the lime tree. "I will greet him with his own ballad."

*"Nenna take lule,  
Nenna take bule,  
U Cara!"*

"(Such a pipe,  
Such lovely wives,  
The Emperor never owned!)"

he began in slow drawling accents.

Silently Mahmud Bâba nodded his head as the well-known ballad, composed by the bard in his honour, and carried by travellers to the remotest parts of Bosnia, met his ear: the

ballad of Mahmud Bâba's costly pipe and lovely wives.

Caressingly the veteran gazed at his pipe, from which exhaled the perfumed smoke of choicest tobacco. With bowl of dark red clay in the form of a half-open Damascus rose, its long stem of jasmine wood ending in a magnificent mouthpiece of black amber, it had not its equal. Moreover, it was held in special esteem, as having been the gift of a Padishah, and handed down from father to son in Mahmud Bâba's family.

No, no such pipe was to be seen in all the country round, nor such a wife as was Mahmud Bâba's.

A few paces behind the kahn, situate in cool surrounding of luscious field and meadow, stood Mahmud Bâba's house, and from behind the curtains of one of the windows looked out the most beautiful woman in all the land, young as the morning, dazzling as the sun, but with an evil frown resting between her black eyebrows.

And again Mahmud gently nodded. She was his seventh. All his wives had been equally lovely, but one after another they drooped and died. And as they died he again choose him the loveliest in the land to wife. Did he now

see this one, the last, beginning to droop like her predecessors?

He saw the evil frown between her brows, saw the outline of the hand with which she convulsively grasped the curtain, as she gazed fixedly at him, and he shook his head. Why could not this young creature be merry? She had food enough to eat, fine clothes to wear, and a double row of ducats round her neck. She ought to be laughing, always laughing.

Close by the lime tree, on the other side of the brook, stood slender young Asiz, who handed round coffee to the guests. All day long, it was his employment to wash out the tiny cups in the clear, running water of the stream, the while he gazed uninterruptedly up at that window through the curtains of which could be seen the outline of a rounded arm. How self-consciously he threw back his handsome young head, causing the tassel of his fez to fly high in air; what a laughing expression was in his eyes; how dazzlingly white were his teeth! For was this not Asiz, the handsomest youth in the province?

And once again Mahmud Bâba shook his head disapprovingly, as he suffered his eyes to rove from one to the other of the young people. And yet why should they not find pleasure in

one another—but later—when he should have gone to his long home—— His head sank deeper upon his breast, the volume of smoke issuing from his pipe gradually died out.

“Asiz!”

At the voice of the old man, the youth started, the smile abruptly left his lips, and it almost seemed as though he turned pale. He cleared the brook at a bound, climbed up the steps to Mahmud’s seat, and obeyed his every wish with well-nigh feverish haste. He refilled the costly pipe with choice tobacco, lit it, and, as the sage put it to his lips, the youth fled back as though he were pursued, and began absently rinsing out the clean coffee cups afresh.

And as the smoke from the solitary pipe began once more to ascend amid the leafy shade of the lime tree, Mahmud’s wish was already fulfilled. The dark, beautiful face behind the curtain had cleared, and that of the thoughtless youth had grown grave. Had ever wish of Mahmud Bâba’s remained unfulfilled?

The bard by the hearth within was singing of times long past and gone; of the *young* Mahmud’s beauty and virtues; then of the old man’s wisdom and strength. His were the loveliest wives; his the richest lands; his the rarest pipe.

Slowly Mahmud Bâba's calm eyes wandered over the surrounding landscape. Waving cornfields and green meadows, rose in gentle undulations, ending at last in heights crowned with juniper trees and thick underwood. All his, as far as eye could reach; all to remain his until he, too, should be carried up there on to the heights, to be laid to rest among the ancient *Bogumils*,\* whose colossal stone sarcophagi, half hidden among the bushes, looked down upon him.

Did he not know every stone far and near; every shrub, when yet but a tender plant, that grew by the silvery, winding stream? The crawling beetle on the path, the bird soaring high in air, all, to him, were as faithful friends of his far-off youth.

He spoke to the flowers, to the wind, and they answered him back, telling him tales of the long ago, ere even he had looked upon the grandeur of Nature.

It was Nature he worshipped, when he thought to worship Allah; and often, as he reverently prostrated himself, did he ardently, fervently, kiss Mother Earth. Noble old Mahmud Bâba was the greatest free-thinker, the greatest revolutionist conceivable; and that without having any

\* Bogumils—an ancient, half-legendary race.

notion that free-thinkers or revolutionists existed. Monarch of his own territory, he recognised no laws because none were needed. And when his hour should come, then would he lay him peacefully down to rest beside the *Bogumils* who had possessed the land before him; and, like them, listen to the soothing sound of the whispering grasses.

His pipe was his one care. With it between his lips he wished to die. No one coming after him must put it to his mouth.

Was the end then really at hand?

Thoughtfully he stroked his long white beard

The singer too was seeking the end of Mahmud Bâba's lay, and, as yet, finding none, continued ever improvising fresh ones. What was he singing now? Of a faithless wife, and a—poisoned pipe.

Mahmud Bâba smiled at the bard's imagining, which ever pictured death as the direst of calamities. And almost he wished that death would come soon, when he was feeling so blissfully weary as now. How sweet was the flavour of his pipe to-day; how beautiful the ever increasingly lustrous eyes of his wife; how exquisitely lovely was the world!

As though steeped in liquid gold the cornfields stretched away before him; a heavy, intoxicating



perfume exhaled from the field flowers, usually so chary of their scent; through the clear, hot air the rays of the sun, just about to set, seemed to burn down upon the earth.

Mahmud Bâba turned his face to the dazzling day-star, his eyes shone with a transfigured light. Gradually the fleecy clouds upon the dark blue firmament assumed a rosy tint, yet a few minutes, and the glowing ball of fire had sunk behind the mountain ridge.

Yearningly the old man stretched out his arms towards the sun.

It was to him as if he were looking on it for the last time.

"No, no, not for the last time! I shall look on thee again, thou Source of Life, when I arise out of the darkness of the grave. I shall look on thee again in the early spring flowers that shall come forth from my body!"

And the sun went down, and Mahmud Bâba's calm eyes closed.

With a clash the beloved pipe fell from the lifeless hand into the brook below, fell at the feet of a trembling, livid youth, and falling, broke.

None else should put it to his lips.

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And the curtains of the window opposite were flung wide back, and the beautiful young woman standing there laughed—laughed as Mahmud Bâba had wished to see her laugh.



# A BOSNIAN SEMIRAMIDE



## A BOSNIAN SEMIRAMIDE.

IT was a wondrously lovely morning in spring of the year 1082; brilliant sunshine was shedding its treasures around with lavish splendour. As if dipped in burnished gold the fortress of Zvornik, built upon a dark massive foundation of rock, rising perpendicularly out of the mirror-like surface of the Drina, stood towering out against the deep blue sky, across which balmy breezes were chasing fleecy rose-tinted clouds. Jewelled in the sunlight shone the windows of the little town which, as if nestling up to its proud sister fortress, stretched away along the left bank of the river, at the base of the Castle heights, following the course of the emerald green Drina, as with mysterious murmur, it flowed northwards between golden-tinted hedges.

The beauty of the morning seemed to have cast its spell over the two horsemen, as slowly and silently they rode along the opposite bank. The younger of the two, who could not have

been much over twenty, was strikingly handsome. He was clad in armour; and the meshes of his shirt of mail, the artistically-wrought golden gauntlets he wore, the costly weapons he carried—broad sword, lance, trusty axe, and shield—glittered like myriads of jewels; and from his helmet waved a blue plume that swept his shoulder; the open vizor displayed a fine, manly, sunburnt face. There was a haughty daring in the manner in which the young knight rode his fiery black steed, caparisoned almost to the ground with its silken, gold embroidered, saddle-cloth. There was something in the easy carriage of the head, in the thoughtful glance of the dark eyes which made him like to the impersonation of those knights of old, still celebrated by the southern Slav in song. Dreamily he gazed, now at the stronghold they were approaching, now at the swift flying birds as they coursed through the ambient air; or lent an ear to the swish of the waves as they rushed past him in the direction whence he had come.

Ever and anon the faint sound of bells would be borne across the water from the little town of Zvornik, the rough wooden roofs of which began to rise out more and more distinctly from amid the opposite trees and hedges.

As he heard the bells, the elder of the two

horsemen, rising high in his saddle, devoutly made the sign of the cross. From his exterior, it was plain to see that he was the young knight's squire, on whose left he rode with deferential mien. His clear eyes, in singular contrast to the rugged weatherbeaten features, rested occasionally with anxiety on the young knight's handsome face; and as he murmured his short prayer, the long grey moustache sweeping down to his shoulders danced with grotesque movement.

Now the younger of the two horsemen, in meditative voice, exclaimed:

"Are you praying, Milosch, that we may not again lose the clue as so oft before?—that Zvornik may prove the goal of our wanderings? Now I well nigh could wish that I might have no sad thoughts to associate with all this loveliness; that I might go forth from here taking the fair picture undimmed in my memory. In that proud fortress which towers above us is said to dwell the loveliest of her sex, the mistress of this smiling plain, and the very thought how slight is the chance against my having to throw down the gauntlet to a frail woman, weighs down my spirit like lead."

Milosch looked at his young master in astonishment.



"By the hilt of my sword, you speak strange words, Vuk Jugovitch! Heaven grant we may be on the right road either to find, or to avenge your two brothers. It is a year and a day since we turned our backs upon our native plains by the upper Bosnia; we have traversed all the neighbouring plains of Croatia; Pannonia, too, we have ranged like true knights errant; and must we now desire that the clue may be a wrong one for sake of that lovely, evil woman, Princess Helena?"

At this remonstrance, Vuk Jugovitch made an impatient gesture.

"No, good Milosch. But I would fain not find there any woman against whom I must unsheathe my sword."

"Humph!" ejaculated the old man; "Helena is not like an ordinary woman, or her reputation belies her. From the mouth of the Drina hither it is her lands we have passed through, stretching away on either side the river, and it is said they extend as far as Srebeniza. A rich, noble heritage, in sooth, needing a man's strength to govern it. People say that Helena rules with iron hand, and can ride her horse with any man to chase away a foe. But have you remarked how timidly the country folk here meet the stranger's eye, glancing askance at

every word as though fearing spies were at his back? Are we, on the Bosnia, wont to see yellow ducats pass so freely from hand to hand, or our young maidens decked with dainty Venetian chains and costly trinkets? Everyone as he tells of the pomp and splendour of Zvornik, suppresses a rising sigh. And to our questions anent your brothers, what has been the answer? That they were known to have proceeded to Zvornik, but, like so many others, had not been seen to return."

The knight gave vent to a half good-humoured, half angry laugh.

"You are as eloquent, Milosch, as though I were minded to prove faithless to my love for sake of that Helena upon whom, as yet, I have not even set eyes. Once safely home again, are you going to slander me to Milieva? Gently, gently, old friend! Rest satisfied that should I find cause, I too can be sworn foe to Helena."

They came to a halt before a low hut, at the door of which sat an old man mending his net, the while his eyes often wandered to a crowded ferry-boat crossing to the opposite bank of the river.

Seeing the two horsemen, he hastily rose, thereby displaying a gigantic stature, and

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removed from his flowing grey locks the rough felt hat he wore.

"Hi, friend," quoth Vuk Jugovitch, "can you tell me how we, who too are bound for the town and fortress of Zvornik, are to get across?"

"I am the ferryman, sir, at your service," was the reply; "but, as you see, my boat is even now crossing with folk going to pay their taxes at the castle. It will wait then on the other side to embark Gospa (duchess) Helena and her knights; she is meaning to ride to Little Zvornik, and it may be some time yet before she comes."

With vexation the two horsemen watched the ferry-boat reach the opposite shore, and saw it fastened to its moorings.

"At any rate, provide us meanwhile with a draught of water, and something from your larder," said Milosch roughly. "We will repay you."

"Willingly, sir. Look upon Ivo, the ferryman's humble roof as your own; the accommodation is scant, and my poor wife, who should keep it in order, is mad."

The horsemen, alighting, crossed the threshold, and with heavy tread and clinking spurs entered the hut in which they could scarce stand upright, and threw themselves down upon the rough

wooden settles that formed the sole furniture of the gloomy room, its only light being that which came in at the open door.

Ivo, meanwhile, had set dried plums, hard bread, and a stone jug of cider before his guests.

At the far end of the hut sat an old woman, so strangely muffled in dark-hued garments that only her ashen face and wild staring eyes were visible. An empty distaff stood beside her, and by the flickering light of the fire she appeared to be busily engaged in spinning, the while she chanted a low monotonous dirge.

"Is this your wife?" asked the young knight compassionately.

"I ask your pardon, sir, if the sight of her displeases you, but I cannot get her to move from there. She fancies that she is spinning a shroud for our son; whilst 'tis many months since he has lain mouldering in the ground," and the ferryman sorrowfully sunk his grey head.

Vuk Jugovitch, refraining from further questions, suffered his eyes to rove round the room. Starting up with sudden movement, he strode across to the other side with a cry of mingled grief and fury. Athwart the beam that ran round the roof hung a collection of costly weapons, and articles of silk and velvet attire,

the richness of which presented a striking contrast to the squalor of their surroundings.

Tearing a finely-wrought gold neck chain and silver-sheathed dagger from off the rusty nail on which they hung, he shouted :

“By all that is holy! these belonged to my two brothers, Milorad and Dushan. None can have robbed them of these in life! Where are their murderers?” And with flaming eyes he sprang towards Ivo, the ferryman, whose throat was already in Milosch’s strong grip. Ivo offered not the slightest resistance to his assailants; whereupon they, seeing this, released him, and breathing heavily, he, falling on his knees, essayed to kiss the knight’s hand.

At the sound of the clash of armour, the mad woman, turning round, cried in a shrill voice :

“Yes. Strike her dead—the accursed one!”

The strange scene being enacted within that gloomy hut was in singular contrast to the smiling landscape without, where the sunshine was caressing the sweet spring flowers.

“Ah, sir,” gasped the ferryman, “blessed be your wrath! May you indeed be the avenger for whom I have waited this many a long year!” And with difficulty, rising, he strode towards the entrance of the hut and signed to the two strangers to follow him.

No sooner was he outside than he sank one knee on the damp grass, while the knight and his squire gazed in amazement at the brilliant spectacle that met their eyes.

The great ferry-boat had that instant touched the shore, a few paces from where they were standing; and a young and lovely woman, preceding a crowd of richly equipped knights and pages, was in the act of springing her horse to land, while with sure and steady hand she guided the jewelled reins of her milk-white steed. Flowing garments of white silk, confined by a golden girdle at the waist, clothed her majestic figure; long tresses, dark as night, were held by a golden circlet from which a diaphanous veil, misty as a cloud, fell about the haughtily poised head. From the pale, lovely countenance shone a pair of great dark eyes of changeful hue, whose striking character was enhanced by the delicate, sharply defined eyebrows which almost met over the nose.

As she rode past, she directed one long searching look at the young knight, rendered even handsomer by the agitation under which he was labouring; and as, followed by her retinue, she cantered past the ferryman's hut to where the high road made a sharp détour, she once more turned her head to gaze at him.

"Cross your thumbs, sir," groaned the ferryman, under his voice, "else you too will fall under the spell of that look. She has the evil eye!"

"Who?" asked Vuk Jugovitch, as though awakening from a dream, when the last of the cortège had disappeared from view.

"Who other than Gospa Helena, who eyed you as the eagle eyes a timid dove?"

Something akin to a smile crossed the face of Milosch, as he heard his young master in coat of mail likened to a dove; the while a vague sense of uneasiness stole into his heart. Had not many an one shaken his head forebodingly on hearing that the handsome youth was bound for Zvornik?

But already the fleeting impression made upon him by the princess's beauty had given place to grief at his brothers' fate, and with threatening voice he now exclaimed:

"Well, old man, what fables are you hatching? By my soul! I tell you if you do not confess the whole truth, and reveal to me what has befallen my two noble brothers, the pride of my parents' hearts, your soul shall quit your body this very instant, and your memory be for ever accursed!"

Without sign of flinching at this address, the ferryman moved a few paces up-stream.

"Look down here into the clear water, sir," he said in a low voice, as though fearing eavesdroppers ; "you can distinguish every pebble at the bottom. It is a sandbank, that, sloping gradually away, reaches out to an immense distance ; thus everything committed to the Drina is brought by the current to this shallow ridge. I had a son, sir, slender as a young fir-tree, his hair golden as the rays of the sun, his eyes blue as heaven's ether ; the staff and pride of my old age. Often when a boy would he, letting himself be washed by the waves, lie dreaming on the river bank, gazing over at yon castle, longing to be one of its inmates. At that time Prince Blagoja—blessed be his memory!—ruled Zvornik with strong, protecting hand. Then every kmet (serf) could hold up his head ; every knight was brave and noble ; the light of justice shone upon all and everyone alike. But there was to come a change.

"Six years ago, with the death of our beloved prince, died the happiness of our land ; inherited by his two daughters. To Gospa Jana (Agnes), the Gentle, was left the territory on the left bank of the Drina, together with the town and fortress ; to Jelena (Helena), the Wild, her father's sorrow, the right bank, and full many a mule-load of treasure with which to build a fortress



on this side. And while Gospa Agnes, faithful to the example of her heroic father, ruled her lands with justice and mercy, Helena, crossing to this side began, some mile or two up-stream, to build herself a fortress exactly opposite to that of her sister. From far and near were folk driven in, and compelled to labour under the lash of Helena's heavy scourges, until many an one sank beneath it. Tears, however, make but sorry mortar, and the ill-omened fortress, raised on so bloody a foundation, made but slow progress. For three whole years the work had been going on, when one day Helena invited her sister to come over and inspect her castle, and see how well the work was progressing. She could be fair spoken when she liked. The rarest delicacies were provided for the banquet; the costliest hangings covered the unfinished walls; and Agnes's visit to Helena's fortress was made the occasion of unrivalled pomp and splendour.

"The next morning I was called upon to ship an exceeding great number of knights, squires, and fighting men over to the left bank; a few hours later a rumour spread with the swiftness of an arrow, that Gospa Agnes was dead, poisoned, and that Helena, the Wild, had taken forcible possession of the fortress of Zvornik.

Men's hearts were filled with hot anger. Furious oaths of vengeance trembled through the air—all, all in vain! Every morning, as it dawned, saw brave men's heads, in ever greater numbers, impaled upon the battlements. Ever deeper and deeper, darkening the smiling plains, sank the bloody mist, under cover of which were enacted horrors known to the Deity alone."

The old man here paused, his head sinking sorrowfully upon his breast.

Vuk Jugovitch and his squire leant against the trunk of a willow; an expression of deep gloom had settled upon their dark countenances; their eyes hung expectantly upon the ferryman's lips.

"Oh, sirs," he resumed, with trembling voice, "that very morning after the banquet, my son, my Mark, ferried Helena across. To this day I can see how her looks were fixed upon his face; how she bewitched him with her evil eyes. Cursed be the hour in which she robbed me of my son! And, then and there, she took him with her to the castle, gave him a velvet doublet, such as the nobles from far-off Venetia are wont to wear, a golden chain round his neck, and cap adorned with long sweeping plume. It was his office to stand behind her chair as she sat at table, and fill her goblet with pearly wine;

and he was so happy in it—his great longing fulfilled . . .

“Scarce a month had gone by, when one morning as I was passing this spot, what should meet my eyes—to the lasting grief of his poor mother!—but my Mark lying here, his velvet doublet and golden hair covered with mud and slime, not thoughtfully dreaming, as when a boy, but dead—dead! While he lived, I deemed myself a king; now, of a truth, I was uncrowned. . . . And my wife’s reason he took with him into his grave. So I was left doubly alone.”

“Did you not seek his murderers?” came from the knight’s white lips.

The ferryman uttered a low, bitter laugh.

“What store is set by the child of a serf? No one asked about him—not a soul. Not even the lovely, wayward woman who had led him to his ruin. Those to whom I told it nervously avoided me as if I had the plague; even the holy friar came only by stealth, at night, to bless the grave I had dug for my boy behind my hut. And I kept silence, and held on to my place, waiting for the avenger whom Eternal Justice should send one day. Two months had passed, when one morning I found another handsome youth lying here in the slime, and scarce a month has gone by since, without the Drina

bringing me the corpse of one from among the handsomest scions of the land. They have been chiefly young nobles who have attended the jousts and other knightly displays at Helena's Castle ; and then have mysteriously disappeared. All have worn sumptuous attire, and no hurt or wound has betrayed the cause of death ; all appear to have been drowned, and each one has held a dark red rose convulsively clenched in his hand. Twenty and one have I lain beside my boy, the while Spring has decked the land for the third time ; they, whom you call your brothers, sir, lie amongst them, for, from each body, ere consigning it to the grave, I have taken some token in remembrance. Mine has been a mournful office these past three years, that of burying the dead, after whom, until to-day, no one has ever asked, or dared to ask."

The young knight was looking on the ground with sinister expression, his lips tightly compressed.

"If I take in your meaning rightly, old man, you hold the princess to have been their murderess?" he said.

"Yes, noble sir."

"And I, too, if you do not lie!——"

The old man started convulsively, then his

head sank again on his breast, a flood of tears streaming from his weary eyes.

Milosch, his face grown crimson, looked not ill disposed to fall to blows with his young master.

Suddenly, something came floating in towards them. It was a long object, which, slowly borne beneath the surface of the water, was gradually being washed on to the bank. . . . Now it rose above the waves, and, the next instant, the startled men were gazing into the still, set face of a dead youth, borne to their very feet by the tide.

A flush of shame at the hard words he had but now spoken to the old man, suffused the young knight's brow, as, seized with horror, he knelt beside the lifeless body.

"Bear me witness, thou departed soul," he cried, "my hand shall avenge thee and my two brothers. The eyes shall close in death, the body shall moulder of him who caused thy undoing. May my death be like thine if I do not keep my oath!"

And with tender, loving hand he smoothed back the dripping hair from the handsome, beardless face of the dead youth, and loosened from the silken garments a branch of thorn, to which the drowning man must have clung ere

the waters bore him away. As he endeavoured to open the tightly-clenched hand a withered half-open damask rose fell from it.

Pallid and motionless Milosch and Ivo stood by.

The three men knelt in prayer, then, looking cautiously around, they raised the dead body, and carried their burden behind the ferryman's hut, where they laid it to rest in the cool earth, amid sweet-scented flowering shrubs.

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The sun stood high in the heavens when they rose from the leafy shade, whither they had betaken themselves to discuss the plan of action. Milosch would fain have repaired at once to the fortress to call the princess to account for the disappearance of his master's two brothers; or, if need be, to avenge them with his own hand.

Ivo, the ferryman, however, advised them to return first to their own province on the banks of the fertile Bosnia, and bring back with them a body of armed warriors.

"If our people see that help is at hand," he said, "they will rise as one man and assist you to put Helena to flight and to avenge her victims."

But to both of these propositions, Vuk Jugovitch disapprovingly shook his head.

"I were a sorry knight did I not dare to face a woman!" he cried. "I should be ashamed to appear before my noble father, and my sweet betrothed with so poor account to give of myself. Neither feint nor subterfuge will I resort to, but, going boldly to Helena's court, will leave the rest to Heaven's guidance. Milosch may part from me if he will; and, in sooth, it were better that he did so, he could the more readily bring help in case of need. If it be possible, I will send tidings of myself; and if, in two weeks no sign have come from me, you will know that either danger threatens, or dungeon walls enclose me; then haste ye to my assistance."

And the young knight's decision remained unshaken, despite all that Milosch or Ivo could urge against it.

"Should the princess return to the castle by this road, I will entreat her to let me accompany her to her court. Meanwhile I will ride upstream in order to reconnoitre the position of the fortress and its surroundings."

"Oh, sir," cried Ivo, warningly, "there is a strong prohibition against anyone loitering on the right bank of the river opposite the fortress."

"The very reason why I should examine it,"

returned Vuk Jugovitch with decision ; and, springing on to his horse, that had stood impatiently pawing the ground, he rode away, Milosch looking sorrowfully after him with the expression in his eyes of a faithful hound.

The knight would not confess even to himself the inexplicable sense of foreboding that was weighing down his spirit. How often had he not sallied forth to bid defiance to some free-booting neighbour, with cheerful courage, sure of conquest? In how many a hard fight had he not proved himself a true knight? Or, did any man do him umbrage, had he not shown himself well skilled in the manner of demanding knightly satisfaction? Nor had the faintest tarnish ever rested upon his shield. But now, all seemed changed. And, strangely intermingled with the grief he was feeling at the untimely fate of his two brothers, did a thousand thoughts, not to be put into words, rush unbidden through his brain.

Ever more leisurely he rode through the whispering grasses, ever denser and higher rose the bushes impeding the horseman's path ; while ever greater and greater grew the distance between the ploughed fields and the river bank, upon which, by the princess's commands, none were allowed, under pain of penalty to loiter.



On the opposite shore the town of Zvornik, with its slender minarets, unfolded itself more and more to view.

But another picture was filling his soul. Was it not on just such a day as this? Aerial sounds vibrated in the atmosphere, tremblingly the grasses bowed beneath the kisses of the sun, as he, accompanied by his two brothers, Dushan and Milorad, rode across the plain of Bosna-Serai, that lay spread out before them, encircled by snow-capped mountains. Towards them rode a party of noble knights and dames, in their midst a sweet maiden with laughing brown eyes, and complexion delicate as a peach-blossom. He had ridden out to join the hawk hunt, yet, though arrow after arrow shot by him missed its mark, his countenance bore so radiant an expression that his comrades, one and all, made merry over it.

Now those two valiant brothers lay in the dark grave, and his brow was clouded with heavy sorrow; nor did that maiden's eyes any longer wear their laughing expression, for her betrothed had been absent a whole year seeking his missing brothers . . . Then Milieva's image died away, and another face, pale, with flashing eyes surmounted by black arching eyebrows that met, rose up before him.

As though struck by an arrow, Vuk Jugovitch started and looked about him. Deep, silent shadows lay around, even the Drina had ceased its murmuring, as it described a soft semi-circle round the mighty walls of solid rock that rose perpendicularly out of the glassy surface of the water. On this side, upon a tower-like base ascending to dizzy height, the capricious hand of Nature had hollowed out a series of caves and grottoes, rising in terrace-like ascents until they reached the plateau crowned by the fortress of Zvornik; the other three sides descended by gentle slopes, to rise again, ere they reached the valley, to yet loftier mountain heights. While these slopes were densely wooded, the precipitous side, looking sheer down to the Drina, merely displayed an occasional glimpse of verdure in among the masses of grey rock.

Not only the natural terraces, but even the most trivial portion of jutting rock appeared to be protected by strong masonry, above which could be seen the waving crests of trees. Many a precipice, forming a chasm between these airy retreats, was bridged over by massive beams and stone work, overlaid with turf and luxuriant vegetation; a close scrutiny showing that the busy hand of man had been at work to coax

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many a leafy bower from out the face of the rigid rock.

There could be no doubt, Vuk Jugovitch saw before him Princess Helena's far-famed hanging gardens. Apparently attached to the rock by a thousand verdant tendrils, this garden, in truth, consisted but of a labyrinth of leafy walks, and larger or smaller arbours and floral retreats, hanging one above the other.

The breeze wafting the scent of fragrant flowers across the river, roused the young knight from his reverie, as, thoughtfully gazing at the rocky heights, he seemed to be striving to solve their mystery. But the waving tree-tops, the flowering shrubs peeping over the walls, and the bright green vines, festooning the escarpments in graceful profusion, nodded such friendly greetings to him, that the knight's trouble of mind did but increase. He felt himself powerless to overcome a softening spirit of conciliation, much as he fought against it, striving to urge himself to one of hatred and wrath. The sun was shining with so golden a light; the smiling sky above was of so deep a blue, that it seemed as though evil had no place in the world; while the unutterable depths of sadness stirring his heart appeared to have stifled all schemes of vengeance within it.

Once more agonising doubts of the truth of Ivo's story assailed him. Did not numberless bands of powerful robbers, committing all kinds of cruelties and horrors, infest the district of the Upper Drina? Why should Helena be accounted the perpetrator of these foul murders—and on the sole witness of a half-crazed old man? What should induce so lovely a being, possessed of all that heart could desire, to perpetrate such horrible outrages?

Pondering thus, his eye was suddenly attracted to a dark object above. Far up in the granite heights, concealed by projecting spurs of rock and luxuriant foliage, his keen eyes seemed to detect something shaped like a small door. Involuntarily driving his silver spurs into his horse's sides, he caused the noble animal to plunge forward knee deep into the river; then, guiding him with cautious hand, Vuk Jugovitch rode forward letting his horse feel his way step by step. Mid-stream was well-nigh reached, the water almost breast high, when the animal obstinately refused to advance a step further, and observation showed Vuk Jugovitch that from that point the river suddenly grew very deep. Searchingly the knight looked up, and now saw clearly what he had come to see—a little doorway almost overhanging the river, opening out

from the very highest tier of sheer precipitous rock. Unlike the many other paths and terraces, this one seemed disconnected from any other. What could be the purpose of an egress up there at that most dangerous part of the rocky precipice? And despite his uneasy position in mid-stream upon a snorting steed, Vuk Jugovitch began to study the problem.

Now distant echoing cries met his ear. Glancing back, the knight saw a lady upon a runaway horse tearing with the swiftness of the wind straight towards the river; and, in the far distance, a confused knot of horsemen galloping after her uttering cries and shouts. In an instant the knight had grasped the situation, and sharply turning his own horse, had reached the bank, sprung to the ground, and thrown himself fearlessly upon the runaway horse, which its rider was vainly endeavouring to control. Seizing the bridle with one mailed hand, he gripped the animal's dilated nostrils with the other in so powerful a grasp that, neighing with pain, it stood still quivering in every limb.

Lightly its rider dismounted; and, as though dazzled, Vuk Jugovitch gazed at the queenly figure, and into the dark eyes and pale countenance to which even the rapid pace had brought no trace of colour.

"Stranger knight, your life is accorded to you in token of thanks," the princess said in melodious voice, but with the imperious tones which it was plain to see were habitual to her.

The young man looked his astonishment.

"Had I done aught to endanger it, princess?" he asked.

Helena's upper lip curled in displeasure.

"All who enter my dominions are subject to my laws; and I have forbidden, under penalty of death, that any should trespass on this bank of the river. Was this law unknown to you, then he, among my subjects, whose duty it was to inform you must be the one to suffer. You, however, are pardoned—Vuk Jugovitch."

"You know me?" he cried, a glow of surprise tinging his bronzed face.

"How should the ruler remain in ignorance when one of Bosnia's noblest sons enters her dominions?" she asked with fascinating smile, thereby disclosing two rows of pearly teeth.

The knight pondered an instant. The ferryman's story; the drowned man; the small gate high above in the rocky walls; Helena's singular prohibition—all thronged with bewildering swift-ness across his brain, almost forcing from his lips the question was the reason of his coming hither known, also, to her?

The princess, looking with full and lingering gaze into the eyes almost beseechingly seeking hers, now with charming coquettish movement, gathered together her flowing silken garments, and glanced round for her retinue, which had halted respectfully at a short distance.

"Will you accompany me, Vuk Jugovitch? I bid you welcome to Castle Zvornik," she said after a pause. "My knights hold a great tournament to-day; and it would give me pleasure to confer the conqueror's prize upon you, my preserver."

Again he remained silent.

She, biting her lips, stamped her foot angrily.

"Hearken, madam," he said gravely, recurring to her first words, "I was acquainted with your prohibition. Had I not had the good fortune to save you from the danger that threatened you, perhaps for a mere caprice you would have had me—murdered?"

A bright crimson flush tinged the princess's pale cheeks at these words; the angry veins on her forehead swelled. But the next instant with a quick, half-angry, half-embarrassed laugh:

"Nay, Vuk Jugovitch," she returned, "there spake your evil genius, or the spirit of Fra Ursmar, my worthy preceptor, who is always seeking to regulate my actions by the standard

of classic perfectibility, bringing back to my mind for that purpose long forgotten passages of Plutarch. That may be all very well for a Franciscan monk, but as far as you are concerned, rest satisfied with my ready forgiveness, and assist me to mount my Selanko."

A half disapproving smile crossed the knight's face, as he looked from his stately height upon the lovely woman, rendered still more bewitching by the defiant air she had assumed.

Stroking the neck of the milk-white Arab, now standing quiet and covered with foam, whose bridle he still held, he extended his hand to the princess. She, scarce touching it, sprang lightly to the saddle, then looked enquiringly at him.

Alas! that he was constrained to do all that those eyes demanded! Pressing the hem of her garment to his lips, Vuk Jugovitch called to his horse, patiently grazing at a little distance, and mounting it, rode back beside the princess the way he had come.

A few horses' length in the rear followed the retinue, and often as the knight glanced back did he see the men's heads together in eager talk, as their eyes rested on the handsome pair before them.

The two rode some distance without speaking. At length Helena broke the silence.



"It was bold in you, sir knight, to speak the word 'murder.' Why chose you it? Even my friends would not venture to utter it in my presence. Is then the penalty for breaking a sovereign's laws to be stigmatised as murder? Oh, Vuk Jugovitch, well I know how men look askance at the rule of a woman, how apt they are to put an evil construction upon her actions."

"Not so, princess——"

Helena made an incredulous gesture.

"Why assume that that prohibition was a mere caprice? And what if I tell you, oh, short-sighted reviler, that at the very spot whither my runaway horse was bearing me there is a wide ford, whence King Dioclea's armed men could easily scale the heights to my impregnable fastness?"

Abashed, the knight looked at his companion. With proud gesture she had thrown back her head, her raven hair and gossamer veil fluttered in the wind; in the dark eyes, absently roving the sunny plain, lay a look of yearning unutterable. He marked the pure profile, the haughty brow; his ear greedily drank in the melody of her voice, and more and more the conviction pressed in upon him that she was guiltless of the ghastly accusations brought against her by the ferry-

man, and that his brothers' murderers must be sought elsewhere.

Slowly she turned her face towards him ; their eyes met, rested on each other's, while a sunny smile irradiated her face, previously so grave.

"Am I a foolish chattering woman to have so lightly disclosed a secret to you?" she resumed. "Oh, Vuk Jugovitch, how heavy is the burden of a crown! And I have no friend to share its burden with me—no one—no one. At that moment when you rescued my life from destruction I felt constrained to bid you swear brotherhood with me. Princess, mistress over the life and death of my subjects as I am, I have not power to command one heart to beat in unison with mine ; nor can the faithfulness of one such heart be bought with all my wealth."

The knight felt nigh to suffocation under his coat of mail, his heart beat so wildly against it.

"Suffer me to swear brotherhood with you. Let me be friend and slave to you, princess."

A light flashed in her eyes at these simple words, vibrating as they did with deep feeling. Now he was hers! Helena knew those accents, proceeding as they did from the very depths of a man's heart. She could have laughed aloud

with glee. From the first moment they had met she had fancied herself in love with the bronzed, handsome young knight; and he—he saw her and her alone; her image filled his every thought and being; from her sweet face he could scarce turn his eyes. And again they rode on silently side by side, a happy smile upon their lips, their hearts too full for words, apparently listening to the gentle ripple of the Drina; he carefully bending back the willow branches that threatened to brush against her.

Suddenly staying her horse, Helena laughingly laid her hand upon his bridle. They had reached the ferry, all unnoticed by her companion.

“Vuk Jugovitch,” whispered the princess archly, “’ware your eyes, lest idle tongues carry their sweet secret further afield.”

And once more the knight marvelled at himself. Happy and joyous as he was, his spirit of a sudden became oppressed as with some heavy sorrow. Was it right that he should thus yield himself up to the witchery this woman exercised over him? He knew it was not; the while he sought to salve his conscience by persuading himself that in thus acting, he was making himself master of the situation, and approaching nearer to the aim he

had in view. Poor fool! fluttering like a moth round a candle! But the dictates of reason fled before Helena's glances as do mists before the sun.

And once more the ferry-boat crossed the Drina with its goodly company of brilliant, distinguished knights. Many a doughty hero was made known to Vuk Jugovitch. There was the hoary-headed Voivode Tehomil, who had fought to free Bosnia from Byzantine rule; the young prince of Hun, and he of Travunja, who had come to take part in one of the tournaments of this most brilliant of courts; the renowned bear-slayer, Bratislov; and full many another, together with the highest nobles of the province of Zvornik. All greeted the stranger knight most cordially; all assured him that his name and the report of his brave deeds of arms had reached them, and that they were proud to meet him; and every word thus spoken served to remove something of the oppression weighing upon him, and a clearer light shone in his eyes as he stood in the circle of these distinguished men.

Why these misgivings? Had it not been his desire to present himself at Helena's court? And was he not hasting thither an honoured guest, and beside the loveliest of women? What more did he want? . . .

When beside the princess, he had ridden past the ferryman's hut, old Ivo and Milosch, the knight's faithful squire, were standing there. He had passed them by without even seeing them, but they had marked his radiant, excited face.

"Heaven be merciful to him," murmured the old ferryman, and tremblingly made the sign of the cross, as though the young knight were being borne off by the Arch-fiend himself.

Old Milosch sunk his head, and it was as if a bloody mist swam before his eyes.

Bystanders in the streets through which the cortège passed nudged one another as they saw Vuk Jugovitch; and young maidens, filling their pitchers at the well, whispered to each other: "How handsome he is! I will offer a wax candle to the Holy Virgin for him."

All these things he neither saw nor heard.

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At that period the fortress of Zvornik was one of the grandest and most impregnable strongholds in the land, Princess Helena herself, having expended vast sums upon the fortifications. Protected on the east by the natural advantages of the sheer precipitous rock and the river Drina, the other declivities were guarded

by extensive ranges of skilfully-contrived out-works; the fortress itself being still further shielded by massive walls of immense thickness, and by a deep, broad moat, with drawbridge leading to the great gate.

It was rumoured in the town of Zvornik that many a one had ingress and egress to the castle without sound of warder's horn, or creak of lowered drawbridge; and some affirmed to have seen on dark nights a kind of flying bridge shot out over the moat from a small gate on the south side of the castle, and a man, curiously clad in gay-hued, flowing garments, with face of ebony blackness, standing by it, pointing out the way to those who came and went.

The man could be none other than his Satanic Majesty himself; and rumour delighted to colour the details the more highly, inasmuch as no one had ever succeeded in finding out the truth.

The stronghold was divided into a number of lesser and greater blocks of buildings which housed the garrison. The portion of the castle inhabited by the reigning family of Zvornik lay away to the east side facing the river.

Now the traveller sees only a mass of ruins where once the stately castle reared its lordly

heights; now the sole sounds that break the silence are the hoarse, weird cries of owls and jackdaws that haunt the deserted battlements.

The princely apartments were two-storied, and the sun, as it glinted through the lofty oriel windows into the spacious halls, revealed a magnificence elsewhere unknown in Bosnia. Lovely women swept their rich attire over floors of mosaic, laid by hands of master artists from Italy; the halls resounded with strains of lute and song. Above, in the turret that crowned the castle, Princess Helena had had a belle-vue constructed, a dainty, bower-like retreat, where throve the choicest exotics of Eastern lands. This was her favourite resort; here, overlooking the rich broad lands at her feet, would she sit for hours, with frowning brow, dreamily gazing over at Little Zvornik, the unfinished walls of which could be seen rising above the wooded slopes. In this chosen retreat the air was soft and balmy with the fragrance of flowers; the princess's maidens laughed and chattered, or listened with languishing air to the love strains of some wandering knight. . . . Ah, that was all long, long ago, ere the splendour of Zvornik had become but dust and ashes!

That same afternoon on which Princess Helena

invited Vuk Jugovitch to her court, a vast concourse of people was swaying backwards and forwards within the great square at the back of the castle. Soldiers, knights, portly citizens, and timid, veiled maidens, standing shoulder to shoulder, were awaiting with bated breath the opening of the tournament, for which the final preparations were being made. Not only all spaces by the barriers that ran round the arena were already densely thronged, but every roof and wall were black with sightseers, amusing themselves, until the jousts should begin, with the antics of jugglers and other showmen who occupied the sanded floor of the scene of action.

At length the fanfare of trumpets was heard, and the princess appeared upon the gorgeously-decorated dais, surrounded by her ladies, who, chosen though they were from among the fairest of the land, only served as a foil to Helena's demoniacal beauty, looking mere modest field flowers beside her pale exotic loveliness.

At a sign from the princess the heralds again blared their trumpets, and now a host of brilliant knights, lance in hand and vizors down, dashed into the arena.

The fight that ensued was grand to witness, those taking part in it being among the most



celebrated and skilled warriors of the land. Yet each man seemed to have his match in his opponent, and the fight waxed more and more hot and furious.

Radoja, son of the king of Travunja, who had come off conqueror in full many a tournament, fought like a lion. The spectators watched his every movement closely; suddenly they saw him lifted from his saddle, and the next instant he was rolling on the sanded floor.

"Ha!" he cried, half jestingly, half angrily, to his opponent, "none but you could unhorse me, Vuk Jugovitch!"

A thunder of applause rent the air. All eyes were turned towards the stranger knight, who, upon his fiery black steed, was accomplishing the most splendid feats of strength and daring, and who, whatever the form of encounter, or whoever might be his opponent, always came off conqueror.

But no eyes followed him with more radiant expression than those of Princess Helena, as she reclined in her state chair, her beautiful features wearing an expression of most perfect content.

And now the heralds, announcing the close of the jousts, Vuk Jugovitch dismounted, and approaching the dais, bent one knee before the

princess, who slowly descended the steps, and stooping over him with well-nigh tender smile, placed the gold embroidered scarf, emblazoned with the arms of Zvornik, across his breast.

With loud voice the house steward now invited all the knights present to attend the princess, his sovereign mistress, to the castle to partake of refreshment, and soon the vast enclosure emptied, while the magnificent banqueting hall began to fill with knights, who had divested themselves of their heavy armour.

The banqueting hall, as indeed all the state apartments of Zvornik, was decorated in Venetian style. The frescoed walls and ceilings were adorned with countless crystal mirrors, from which were reflected the light of myriads of wax candles in chandeliers and candelabra. The long oaken table fairly groaned beneath the weight of the heavy silver plate upon which were served the rarest delicacies: fish caught on the distant shores of the Adriatic; game from the home preserves; fruit the most luscious and choice.

At the upper end of the table, in place of the carved wooden chairs ranged round the other sides, stood a velvet throne-like seat for the princess.

Vuk Jugovitch was sheer bewildered with all

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this magnificence, hitherto unknown to him ; the home he had left seemed poor indeed by comparison. He himself seemed changed. The novelty, the unaccustomed nature of his surroundings, the applause and admiration of which he had lately been the object seemed to have made another man of him, and, almost unresistingly, he suffered himself to be carried along in the vortex in which he found himself.

Leaning with folded arms against a pillar, he stood gazing fixedly at the door by which the lady of the castle was to enter.

"What say you, Stiepo Guiritch," whispered a young knight to his neighbour, as he glanced at Vuk Jugovitch, "did yon stranger win the prize solely by his own prowess to-day, or did the red plume he wears help towards it?"

The man thus addressed shrugged his shoulders.

"Humph! Difficult to say! He wields a good lance any way; and even if one of us Zvornik men care not to unhorse one wearing the princess's blood-red plumes before her very eyes, do not forget that the Prince of Travunja fights like the very devil. More by token, his seamed face carries so little way with the ladies, that he has need to reckon himself invincible on the jousting ground."

The younger man gave a scornful laugh.

"There was no time lost to-day. This morning when we met him on the heath, he was sporting a sky-blue plume that swept his shoulders. His colours were quickly sacrificed to the new lady of his affections. By my troth! I am no new-comer like this stranger, but at such a price I could well nigh wish myself one of those to receive Dame Helena's red plumes, were it not that——"

"Pst!" exclaimed the other, turning pale, "'ware your tongue. Here she comes!"

A flourish of trumpets announced the princess, who, followed by her ladies, majestically entered the banqueting hall. She was preceded by her house steward, who bore upon a salver a curiously-wrought golden goblet, filled with mysteriously sparkling red wine.

"Vuk Jugovitch," said the princess, signing him to approach, "let this goblet be to you, as victor, a token of this day's triumph."

And taking the goblet from the salver, she placed it to her lips, then handed it to the knight, who drained it at a draught.

"Now, major-domo," she continued gaily, as she took her seat, "perform your office. But see that you place not our pretty maidens beside old greybeards, as on the last occasion; and forget not to see that the wine cup circulates

merrily. Vuk Jugovitch, hero of the day, place yourself at my right hand; and you, noble Tehomil, be content to take your seat on my left."

"Content, princess," returned the old Voivode gallantly, as he leisurely took the seat assigned to him, "give me but a place at your feet, I were satisfied."

Laughingly Helena turned to Vuk Jugovitch:

"Are you of an equally contented spirit, knight?" she asked. "Which place would you choose?"

The wine that he had drunk began to course like liquid fire through the young man's veins. His eyes did not leave the face of the lovely woman beside him; and for the first time she saw his grave countenance break into a smile, as, in low tones, he replied:

"In your heart."

"Well said," laughed Tehomil. "That is the way to please the ladies. Audacious and cooing in the doublet; a very lion unchained in armour. You seem to understand the art even better than did your brothers."

As though struck by an arrow Vuk Jugovitch started convulsively.

"My brothers! Did you know them, Voivode?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Why, of course! It is not so very long ago since they were sitting in the place you occupy now, looking to the full as languishing and sentimental as you are doing, and approving themselves as bold and daring in fight as you have done, Sir Knight. Is it not so, princess?"

Helena had been absently gazing up at the ceiling, as though absorbed in the minnelieds the minstrels were singing. Now leisurely bowing her head in reponse to Tehomil's question, she held out her goblet to the cup-bearer to be filled.

With trembling heart the young knight looked at her.

"And know you nothing of their subsequent fate, princess?" he asked.

Carefully examining the tips of her rosy finger nails, she shook her head, as she replied:

"Very little. Milorad received tidings that a body of the Duke of Hun's mercenaries were marching against Dioclea, and, despite all persuasion, he insisted on repairing to Srebreniza, to join the attacking force. A few weeks later Dushan followed him, to our sorrow, for both were delightful companions."

"Ah, a great pity you had not allowed me to go with them," growled Tehomil jestingly, "then I should have known what had become of them."

For one moment Helena pressed her lips tightly together.

"Yes, in order that you, my knights and voivodes, might each have raised your own standards. Ever ready to lavish money and prowess when you can go your own individual ways, weakening the land with internal feuds, if your sovereign calls upon you, there is never a stiver in your purses!"

"But, your highness, were you ever left in straits?"

"I am no child to be put to sleep with lullabies!" exclaimed Helena impatiently. "Oh, yes, of course, we are to wait patiently until adversity has crushed us, and the Diocletians have invaded the land. Wherever I turn 'no money' is ever the cry! Then, if need be, we will draw some from our neighbours. I mean to be ruler over a vast, mighty territory, not over this petty country, made hateful to me by the craft and insubordination of its people. There is not a knight among you but sows discord wherever he sees a chance; not one but would fain chase the woman from Zvornik so that he might place the diadem on his own head. And if to the weal of the many I must sacrifice the good of the few, I am looked upon as cruel, hard, bloodthirsty——"

"Now, Helena, my pet," interrupted Tehomil, glancing round him uneasily, "what makes you talk like this? Have I not honestly fulfilled your noble father's dying wish, and ever stood by your side your loyal, faithful counsellor? How can you desire me to give my sanction to the equipment of an attacking force for the acquisition of fresh territory, when there is not a man in Great Zvornik but is so panic-stricken from fear of the Diocletians, that he is ready to desert to the Servians and Byzantines? In such times a people is ever timorous, excited, disturbed about their own goods and belongings, and but little disposed to deeds of heroism. And, my little Nell, the expenses of the last few years have been somewhat heavy! Do not be angry with me for saying this. You know you have always been my darling, from the time you were our little wild Helena! You have ever been good and noble, despite your strange moods and passionate nature; and the people are just stupid, superstitious, and credulous. So smile again, little Nell, and do not cloud our festivities by grave looks," and the old Voivode looked beseechingly at her.

She had listened to his words with frowning brow; now silently turning her back upon him, she looked at Vuk Jugovitch, who, with



flashing eyes, had caught Tehomil's hurried utterance.

What he heard had banished the last shadow of doubt from his soul. Yes, her subjects were stupid, superstitious; Helena, good and noble!

She looked scrutinisingly at him.

"What think you, Vuk Jugovitch? Is the Voivode right?"

"In my poor judgment, yes, princess. A wise man bends to the storm, that its fury may be spent without loss to himself. The first duty of a sovereign is to guard the trust committed to him; to promote the good and welfare of his subjects, not to—"

"Yes, yes," she broke in bitterly. "But like the eagle soaring high in the air the sovereign sees further afield than those who crawl on earth. In my case, of course, it is different. I am chained with cut wings to this rock."

"Helena!"

As if aflame her face flushed scarlet at the tone in which her name was spoken. She darted a hasty glance around.

The old Voivode turned completely away from her, was joining in a noisy discussion with his neighbours anent the events of the day's tournament, and at that moment was giving vent to a burst of immoderate laughter,

while, in order to appease the threatened strife of opinion, others were lustily calling for dice.

"Truly, you are an adept in the art of speaking honied words, knight; while, at heart, you are no better than any of the wine-heated men about us. A despicable, mean-spirited people," exclaimed the princess vehemently, after a pause. "And yet I cannot do without them, and must e'en wear out my ardent heart upon these chill, lonely heights. Oh, Vuk Jugovitch, the whole universe seems to me all too narrow and contracted, and were all the blood within it poured out, it could not still the fever of my veins."

In his agitation the knight, seizing the little hand resting amid the folds of her garment, pressed it.

"And what of love? Oh, Helena, princess, beloved!"

"Love, boy? Know you it? Oh, could I but raise you to my heights; could I but breathe into your soul one spark of my impassioned feelings—for even a princess is but a woman craving for love. Oh, Vuk Jugovitch, wert thou but mine; mine, thine every thought and breath; mine, every pulsation of thine heart; then away all power and sovereignty, away all palm of victory and laurel wreath of fame.

All—all were nothing—nothing! For naught is our own, but present delight.”

As with sound of thunder, the whispered words, ever more and more impassioned, struck upon his ear.

His broad chest heaved tumultuously, he pressed his burning hand to his brow. Could it be true—really true? Did that rose among women blossom alone for him? Ah, enviable mortal.

All around them the noise of excited voices, of oaths and disputes over the throwing of dice, the coarse jests, shrill laughter of the ladies, the music, the glare of light, the heavy Dalmatian wine, all combined to bewilder his senses; whilst, pale and lovely, beside him, she—Helena—was so bewitching, and in his own heart was surging all the suddenly won, inconceivable bliss.

Stand still oh time, or else let life itself end in such moments, the joys of which can ne’er return!

Slowly, noiselessly, the princess rose.

“Come, Vuk Jugovitch, let us leave these noisy revellers. Their clamour disgusts me, the oppressive atmosphere stifles me. See, how the moonlight falls through the windows, how peaceful it looks. I will show you my castle.” She had seized a candelabra as she spoke;

now, taking his hand she drew him from the banqueting hall unperceived.

Without stood her faithful attendant.

"Go before us, Teuta," she said, handing her the light.

And now under Teuta's guidance they proceeded up and down flights of stairs, through deserted halls, following the flickering wax lights, as though they were will-o'-the-wisps. The knight's footsteps rang out with hollow sound on the smooth mosaic red floors streaked with moonlight; while, shadow-like, Helena glided noiselessly by his side, the firm clasp of her slender fingers ever drawing him onward; while, with face half turned towards him, she kept her dazzling eyes fixed upon his. The moon, shining through the stained glass windows, coloured the tall, white figure now red, now blue, as it pressed forward, as though pursued by some invisible force; while, without pause, she continued to name to him the various arms, suits of mail, trophies, rare tapestries and hangings that adorned the walls, in a voice low, vibrating, but almost inaudible, as though she feared to awake the silent echoes. The words seemed to fall from her lips mechanically, without her knowing what she was saying; nor did the knight pay any heed to the spoken words.

"Stay, look at these," she said, stopping abruptly before a row of pictures roughly painted on wood. "These are my ancestors. Look at that one, standing out from the background of gold, as befits a princess. How forbidding and hideous she looks. No master's hand has ever succeeded in softening those features; every smile conjured up upon them has vanished. Therefore, I have had the same face chiselled in red marble, upon which a warm evening glow ever plays, yet still it will not smile. Look how the gloomy eyes stare full at us. It is I, myself, Vuk Jugovitch. Will not they who come after us, looking on that marble, say, '*Prokleta Jelena!*'" (Helena, the Accursed.)

And with a hard, shrill laugh letting go the knight's hand who, horror-stricken, was gazing at her, she turned to an open window.

In sublime peace the broad valley of the Drina lay stretched beneath, flooded by the bright silvery light of the moon.

The knight, following her, leant over the embrasure of the window. Below him yawned a hideous chasm, a distant sound as of the murmuring of water, and the rustling of trees met his ear.

"Princess," he exclaimed, "deign to grant me

one request. Fain would I look upon your far-famed hanging gardens."

Princess Helena seemed to grow a shade paler. Silently she turned back the way they had come.

"Helena!"

She heard not. With flying feet hasting down the marble staircase to the floor beneath, she paused before a heavy iron door, concealed within a niche. The discordant voices of the revellers penetrated to where they were standing.

"Return to the banquet, Vuk Jugovitch."

Imploringly, he gazed at her.

"And my request?"

At a sign from the princess the door swung open. On its threshold stood a Nubian of gigantic proportions, who, at sight of his mistress, humbly prostrating himself, kissed the ground before her. Supported on columns, a marble hall, more magnificent than any he had yet seen, now met the knight's astonished gaze; glancing through the columns he saw by the light of the moon the outline of dusky arbours, and of nodding, sweet scented flowers that whispered in the night wind.

"He who once crosses this threshold becomes my slave, Vuk Jugovitch!"

He fell down before her with heaving breast, his trembling hands sought hers.

"Such suffer me to be, Helena, beloved! Yours in life and death—"

Bending so low over him that her hot breath scorched him, her dark, wondrous eyes flashing with fiendish light:

"Mine would you be, Vuk Jugovitch?" she cried as if with suppressed triumph. "Oh, heavens, how great is my love for you! But know, that all memory, all thought must be relinquished e'er you cross this threshold, for here there is no way of return. . . Mine must you be . . . for ever. . . "

It was as though she would read the answer in his burning glances.

"Return to my guests, the night is waning; they will soon be separating. Leave the fortress with them, announcing that you are departing hence at break of dawn. Then turn your horse's head and gallop quickly back that you may reach the southern gate e'er the stars have sunk in the heavens. Mulej, my Nubian, will await you, and lead you hither."

The iron door closed behind the princess, Vuk Jugovitch pressed his glowing face against the marble wall. Then, Teuta seizing his arm, drew him through the dark corridors, and the next

moment he found himself once more in the dazingly lighted banqueting hall amidst the wine-heated carousers.

\* \* \* \* \*

He who once has looked down into the depths of an abyss knows the powerful fascination it exercises over the mind of the beholder. Well aware that death and destruction lie in wait beneath, horror-struck, clutching out wildly at anything that shall avert the catastrophe—the victim is yet hurried, almost without power of resistance, down into the luring depths. So is it with the moral abysses of life. The man knows the danger, knows how to avoid it, yet the very dread acts as does the spur on a thoroughbred horse, and the man rushes on to his destruction with a clear knowledge of the fact, but with enfeebled power of will. Why? The abyss alone can tell.

In a rocky hollow of Princess Helena's wondrous hanging garden a young man was sitting on a bench, his head resting against the moss-grown rock. His eyes were closed, a deathly pallor lay upon the handsome features; only when a gust of wind ruffled his dishevelled hair did he languidly open his eyes and suffer his gaze to wander over the valley of the Drina,



through which the gale was raging with wild fury. In the firmament dark clouds were rising, tinged with deepest violet by the evening sun, as surrounded by a blood-red mist, it was setting behind the mountain range.

Sighing, he closed his eyes once more, his every thought concentrated in the sense of hearing; tremblingly, he listened and listened to every sound of the trees, tossing in the wind. Was not that the gentle rustle of a woman's dress approaching closer and closer? And now the white-marble goddess, standing on a rocky crag over the ravine, smilingly turns her lovely head in his direction, glides down from her pedestal and bends over him—her cold marble countenance changing to one soft and rounded, with peach-like bloom, and eyes of velvet brown.

"Are you sad, Vuk Jugovitch? Ah, me! when you loved me you knew no sorrow. My faithful heart has followed you, my betrothed. For fourteen days past I have watched your cheeks growing ever paler, the light in your eyes fading. Come, flee this enchantment."

"Milieva—oh, Milieva—I cannot," he groaned

And, weeping, the vision fled from him, veiling her face. The darkness of night fell about him; he was alone.

"Milieva!" he cried aloud. "Milieva!"

A hand was laid heavily upon his shoulder.

"Are you dreaming, Vuk Jugovitch?"

He started to his feet. The greyish-violet tint of the clouds had not wholly disappeared, and he was not alone. A tall woman's figure, enveloped in a purple mantle, her raven hair surmounted by a narrow golden circlet, stood before him.

The young knight's frame quivered with glad surprise, seizing her hands he pressed them to his lips.

"Helena, my love, why have you left me so long alone among these cold rocks? Oh, Helena, two whole days without you are as two years of torment, of endless sorrow and anguish."

The princess looked with frigid unmoved expression into the knight's tender eyes.

"Was it for me you were pining?" she asked. "It seemed to me it was some other name than mine that I heard you utter."

He looked gravely at her.

"In my dreams I saw my betrothed—the girl I was to have wedded—"

"And to whom, for my sake, you broke your troth, is it not so?" interrupted the princess disdainfully. "Methought in your demeanour, I had observed grief for your lost happiness. Why not try to recover it?"

T

"My lost happiness. Ah, Helena, I could almost believe it now wholly lost, despite the unspeakable torture with which it has been purchased."

He spoke excitedly.

Helena threw her head back with imperious movement.

"You speak of torture, knight, you! Ha, ha, ha! I would fain see how many of the noblest of your sex would not gladly take your place."

"Helena, you break my heart. Ah, yes, I have known happiness in your presence, a very paradise of bliss; but how short have been those hours of delight, how endless the pain. For days together have I wandered in this maze, feeling that I could dash my head against the rocky walls of my prison. Oh, hideous hours. Here they come again, the wild maddening thoughts, driving and hunting me to despair. I have besought Mulej to let me hearken at the iron door, at least to catch the sound of your beloved voice, but inexorably he waves me back; nowhere can I find relief or escape from this terrible, torturing solitude."

"Then go, I release you," said she.

His mouth quivered convulsively.

"You have a right to speak thus, princess. The happiness you have bestowed upon me

out-balances the loss of freedom. You told me beforehand that there was no going back for those who enter here."

"It is not true. I said it but to test you. You may go."

With a loud groan he pressed his head back against the damp moss.

The last glow of the setting sun had vanished; the stormy wind was sweeping in howling gusts over the rocky walls.

Helena shuddered. In a wild ecstasy, her eyes gleaming with unnatural light, she drew him to her, covering his face with kisses, with trembling voice calling him by a thousand endearing names. Then shudderingly, freeing him, she gazed out into the darkness that had so rapidly fallen upon them.

Ever closer and closer came the storm.

Now it seemed as if all Nature held its breath, suddenly to burst with redoubled fury upon them.

The storm—the storm—

She had grown livid.

"You must go, Vuk Jugovitch—you must go—" fell voicelessly from her lips.

"Why?"

The princess pressed her icy hand to her brow as if to recall her thoughts.

"Why? Is not one whole fortnight of this billing and cooing enough? Let it be a thing of the past. You have brought this upon yourself. Did I not impress upon you the necessity of taking steps to make your sudden disappearance unmarked? Why sent you not your squire Milosch home? In his blind zeal he has lighted a very torch of disaffection among my people; they are even now storming the castle gates demanding your release, or threatening to brand me as your murderess. It is not that I fear these low-born rioters, but it were better that you went out to show yourself to them, than that I should have them brought here that they may satisfy themselves of your safety."

"I will go," returned Vuk Jugovitch, rising wearily.

She stood immovable, looking straight before her. The wind was beating the fine blinding rain into their faces.

"Helena, my love, how strange you are!"

He rested his head upon her shoulder.

"Must it be—must I part from you—for ever? May I not return? Oh, Helena, sweet dove, what is the short span of time compared with the eternal strength of my love?"

He heard her short, quick breathing; her voice sounded harsh and broken.

"What is eternal, Vuk Jugovitch? Naught save life and death. Hark to the unchained elements! And yet the day, now departed, was fair and sunny. Youth flees as the glow of morning; love fades as do the flowers that are kissed by the sun; the voice of song dies away—man, too, dies—and all is over—all—all! Come!"

Together they trod the gravel-strewn path. Impenetrable darkness surrounded them; the rain had ceased.

"Mulej!" called the princess.

Imploringly the knight seized her hand.

"One instant, princess. Grant me yet one petition—it may be the last. Accompany me yourself to the gate."

He felt how she tried to release her hand from his.

"Helena, by all that is dear to you, I implore you. Do you not remember how you awaited me that night at the iron door; how, led by your hand I first entered this paradise? And now, would you send me from it, turn me away, like one of the lowest of your menials? Will not your lips bid me the last farewell?"

"You are a dreamer, Vuk Jugovitch. So let it be, then." She strove to speak kindly, but her throat was contracted. "You cannot,

however, go back again through the castle, where you would be seen by all my retainers. I will show you another way out; hidden in among the rocks it leads down to the valley beneath," she paused. There was a sound of suppressed calling, and Mulej's gigantic stature rose up before them.

"Your highness," he gasped, "the people have forced their way into the castle, and are seeking entrance into the garden. The garrison has gone over to the insurgents—hear you not their cries and roars? Fly, fly!"

The princess looked up to the colossal walls of her fortress. A confused, deadened sound from the windows of the vast, dimly-lighted apartments reached to where she stood; a sound second by second growing louder until it rose into a thunderous roar, accompanied by the clang and clash of arms. They were seeking her.

Instead of showing alarm or fear, the queenly figure stood calm, erect, with pale face gleaming and wondrous eyes that seemed to flash in the pitch darkness.

"Never will the ruler of Zvornik flee from her enemies. My throne still stands, and shall not fall as long as I draw breath. Back, miserable slave, back to the iron door of the hall of

columns! There, with my sword, await me—I will but conduct this man to a place of safety.”

“What are you saying,” cried the knight. “I will not stir from here until—”

“Silence, you too, slave!” was the imperious answer. “Zvornik’s mistress needs no support from stranger’s arms, rather would she fall. Mean you to disgrace me by being found here?” And with irresistible strength she dragged him onwards over the narrow, winding path, past many an enticing, leafy arbour, its wealth of flowers dimly lit by myriads of coloured lamps, shining like glow-worms in the darkness. At length, stopping, she passed her hands over a huge mass of rock. Noiselessly it moved aside and disclosed a square, dark aperture yawning before them, while a distant murmur of water met their ears.

“Bend your head,” said the princess, “the doorway is low. Here—feel your way slowly along the side—do not fear; there is a deep step outwards—it leads down—”

A vivid flash of lightning illuminated the darkness, for the space of a second the place where they stood was bathed in electricity; Vuk Jugovitch uttered one piercing cry, heart thrilling, terrible as the cry of a wounded lion.

They were standing upon the plateau of the



tower-like rock that formed the foundation of the vast fortress, and in that aperture he had recognised the little door that he had seen the day on which he rode his horse into the middle of the river bed. A rose-bush was growing out of the rock, its branches, covered with magnificent deep red roses, spreading away on every side.

As that flash of lightning had illuminated the darkness, so into the night of his soul a light had burnt, revealing, laying waste, destroying.

"Helena!" said he, "am I the first who has trod this path? Methought I once saw a dead man in whose rigid hand was clutched a rosebud like to those."

A peal of thunder shook the air. With convulsive grasp he seized the woman by the shoulders, the strands of her long, wet hair twined like serpents round his wrists; he could hear her teeth chattering, as if with ague.

As the noise of the thunder rolled away into the distance, ghastly, piercing cries for help were heard from the hall of columns; then they suddenly ceased.

"Are you mad, Vuk Jugovitch?" gasped Helena, writhing in his powerful grasp. "Heard you not Mulej? It is over—they have killed him."

Now a confused murmur of voices was heard

in the gardens, torches gleamed in and out of the trees. Ever tighter and tighter the knight held the struggling, desperate woman in his grasp. His flaming eyes were those of a madman.

"Yes, it is over. Do you hear your pursuers coming on? But I am nearer to you than they. You are mine! Powers of darkness—you that heard my oath—thanks be to you that in my forgetfulness you have reminded me of it! Helena! by all you hold dear, tell me, were you my brothers' murderess?"

Once again the lightning flashed. He looked into her face distorted with fury; a bloody foam was on her lips; a horrible, meaningless expression was in her eyes.

"Yes," she shrieked, with a burst of wild shrill laughter. "I loathed their kisses as I loathed yours, and those of the others. I have had my share of the pleasures and enjoyments of the world—now to hell!"

With superhuman strength he lifted her in his arms as if she were a mere child.

"Helena," he sobbed wildly, "Helena, my beloved, my sweet, my delight, my joy, die you must. Oh, Helena—for ever accursed!"

He would have cast her down into the unfathomable abyss beneath, but the aperture was

narrow, and he sank on one knee with his burden, the princess clinging to him like a panther.

A voiceless, desperate struggle ensued between them ; a wrestling for life or death.

Ever nearer came the torchlights, ever nearer sounded the voices, ever nearer came the clang and clash of arms.

"Vuk Jugovitch!" resounded a sonorous voice. "Vuk Jugovitch! Do you hear? I, your faithful squire am here!"

Again a lurid flash of lightning lit up the scene, and Milosch, the faithful squire, saw his master's form disappearing into the abyss beneath, dragged down by a pair of white arms.

Helena had secured her victim.

\* \* \* \* \*

This time two bodies, closely entwined, were washed by the Drina to Ivo, the ferryman's feet—those of Vuk Jugovitch and Princess Helena.

Behind his hut, under fragrant lilacs, the old man laid them side by side—the last Princess of Zvornik and her last victim.

\* \* \* \* \*

The throne of Zvornik fell, and with it departed its ancient pomp and splendour.

That same year the King of Dioclea subjugated the principality of Zvornik, the bulwark of golden Bosnia ; which latter, in the course of a few years, also yielded to his victorious arms.

In the fortress of Zvornik is shown to this day the marble presentment of the Princess Helena. Some generations later the Turks, in constructing new ramparts, had it built into the wall. It is a red marble slab, on which is sculptured the figure of a woman. Above, on the left hand, are still visible the remains of an ancient Slav inscription.

\* \* \* \* \*

Zvornik is a thing of the past. The sins of its last ruler remain still unabsolved, still unforgiven by her people, in whose memory she yet lives as "Helena the Accursed" (*Prokleta Jelena*).

THE END.

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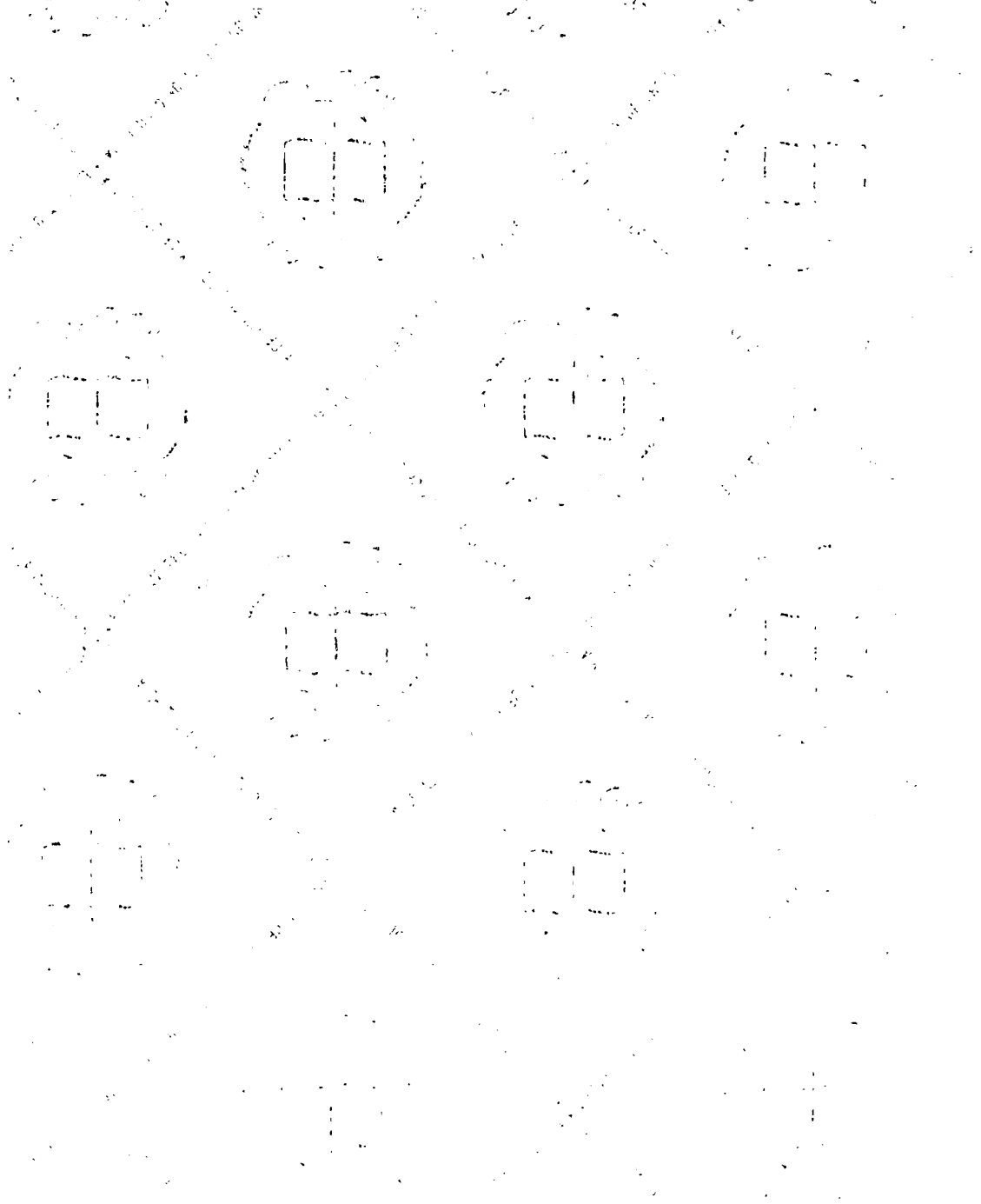


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